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OTTERDAMMERUNG

as retold by Oliver Huckel

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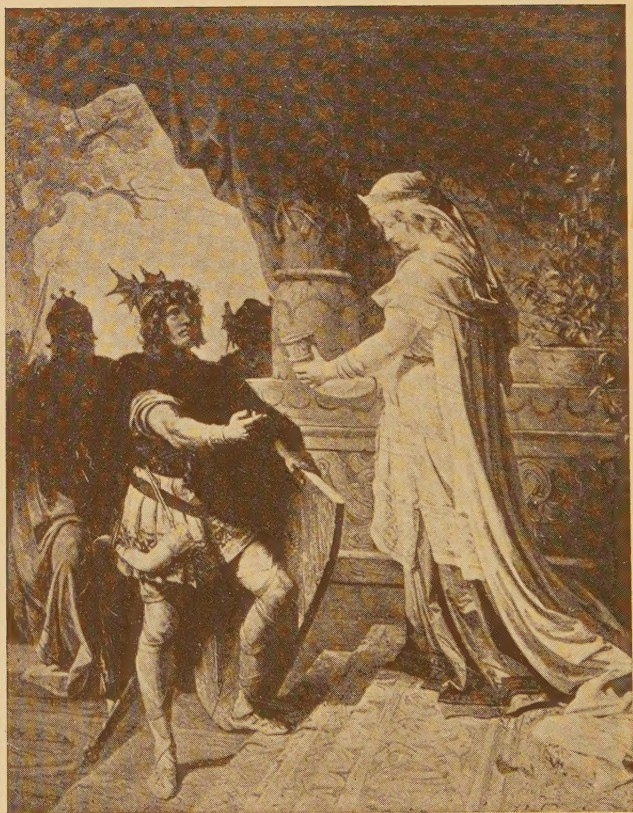
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The Dusk of the Gods

(Götterdämmerung)

A · DRAMATIC · POEM · BY · RICHARD
WAGNER · FREELY · TRANSLATED · IN
POETIC · NARRATIVE · FORM · BY

Oliver · Huckel



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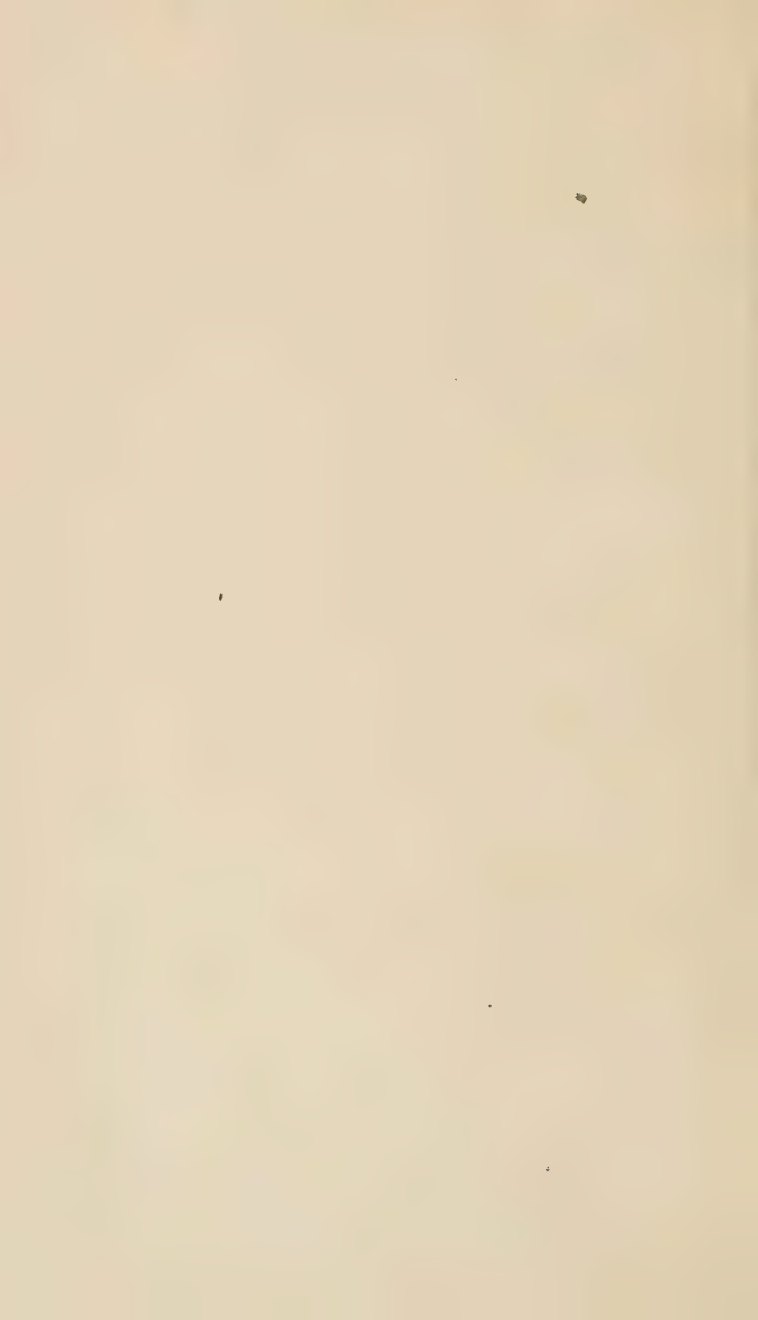
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FOREWORD



HERE is something primitive, colossal, majestic in Wagner's fourfold music drama of *The Nibelungen Ring*.

It partakes of the power and grandeur of the earlier ages of the world. It is a drama of the mighty era of the gods, the giants, and the heroes before the coming of man upon the earth. It is the wondrous story in which was enwrapped much of the religious belief of our ancient Northern ancestors in Europe.

The deepest truths of this drama of primitive life are universal, and their meanings as potent to-day as in the prehistoric world. It is a vast allegory of the strongest passions of life. It is a dream of yesterday and a vision of to-morrow, if we have eyes to look into the heart of its mystery.

It is the aim of this present translation and interpretation to present the story of *The Ring* in the clear and strong way of the German original, to show the relation of the parts and the dramatic unity of the whole, to make the whole vast epic stand out in its own vivid light and thrilling power.

The usual English librettos of *The Ring* are totally inadequate and confusing as translations of Wagner's text. They are made to suit the musical requirements rather than to present the thought in literary form. It is often a perplexing task rather than a pleasure to read them. Tenfold more involved and obscure than Browning, they have none of his redeeming grace of thought or speech.

Fore- word

The present translation aims to be faithful to Wagner's text, and at the same time clear in thought, poetic in imagery, rhythmic in expression. It endeavors to transfuse into English the very spirit of Wagner's lofty thought.

It will be remembered that Wagner wrote *The Nibelungen Ring*, first of all, merely as a poem, and so it was originally published. The music was not composed until a later period. Some parts of the published poem he did not use for the music, and they are not given in the librettos, — for instance, Brunnhilda's splendid farewell words in *The Dusk of the Gods*, — but we have used them in this translation as being a real part of the poem, and as a fine inspiration for the interpretation of the fullest thought of the drama.

The Nibelungen Ring, as Wagner gives it, is divided into four dramas, — *The Rhine-Gold*, *The Valkyrie*, *Siegfried*, and *The Dusk of the Gods*. These are a tetralogy, a cycle of four great music dramas, or, as it is sometimes designated, a trilogy, considering *The Rhine-Gold* as a prelude to the greater story of *The Valkyrie*, *Siegfried*, and *The Dusk of the Gods*.

In these introductory words we may find it helpful toward a clear understanding to consider the four dramas as one great epic whole, — for such they are, — and to study the sources of the story, the story itself, and finally its spiritual and universal significance. In doing this each one of the dramas will be studied in some detail, the special features noted, the unusual references explained, and the dramatic scope

and purpose considered. Wagner's part in the remarkable welding into unity will then be clearly seen. **Fore-
word**

I

As to the sources, we may remember that *The Ring*, as we have it in Wagner's dramas, is not taken from the ancient *Nibelungen Lied*, to which it bears some resemblance, but it is an independent composition. It was derived by Wagner from various ancient songs and sagas, composed by many old bards, and Wagner wove it into one great harmonious story. Its main features, and also innumerable details, are from the old Norse and German myths, but there has been selection and rearrangement of the material. The principal source of *The Ring* was the *Volsunga Saga*, a Scandinavian epic, preserved in the Icelandic literature. Lesser parts of the story are taken from the *Elder Edda* and the *Younger Edda*, old Norse sagas. Other parts are taken from the *Nibelungen Lied*, the *Eckenlied*, and other Teutonic folklore.

The great drama, as Wagner finally evolved it, is wonderfully true to the ancient spirit, and gives a splendid glimpse into the earlier mythology and legends of the Northern peoples. In the drama of *The Ring* there is portrayed a primitive existence in the world, and at first there are only four distinct races,—the gods, the giants, the dwarfs, the nymphs. Later, by a special creation, there come two other races,—the valkyrie and the heroes. As to the characterization of these races, we may note that

Fore-
word the gods are the noblest and highest race, and dwell first in the mountain meadows, later in the palace of Valhalla on the heights. The giants are a great and strong race, but lack wisdom; they hate what is noble, and are enemies of the gods; they dwell in caves near the earth's surface. The dwarfs, or nibelungs, are black, uncouth pigmies, hating the good, hating the gods; they are crafty and cunning, and dwell in the bowels of the earth. The nymphs are pure, innocent creatures of the water. The valkyrie are daughters of the gods, but mingled with a mortal strain; they gather dead heroes from the battle-fields and carry them to Valhalla. The heroes are children of the gods, but also mingled with a mortal strain; they are destined to become at last the highest race of all, and to succeed the gods in the government of the world.

The principal gods are Wotan, the first of the gods; Loki, the god of fire; Donner, the god of thunder; Froh, the god of joy. The goddesses are Fricka, wife of Wotan and goddess of marriage; Freya, the goddess of love; Erda, the goddess of earth. The chief giants are Fafner and Fasolt, brothers. The chief dwarfs are Alberich and Mime, brothers, and later Hagan, son of Alberich. The chief nymphs are the Rhine-daughters, Flosshilda, Woglinda, and Wellgunda. There are nine Valkyrie, of whom Brunnhilda is the leading one. The most important relationship to remember is that of Brunnhilda and Siegfried. Brunnhilda is the daughter of Wotan and Erda. Siegfried is the son

of Siegmund and Sieglinda, both of whom are children of Wotan by a mortal woman. The drama culminates with the slaying of Siegfried and the sacrificial death of Brunnhilda.

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There are many magical elements in the drama of *The Ring*, such as the ring itself, which endows its owner with supernatural power and ensures the obedience of others to his commands; the *tarnhelm*, or wishing-cap, which enables its owner to become invisible, or to assume any form he pleases; the sword, which has magic power, given by Wotan; the golden apples that grow in the garden of the goddess Freya, and impart eternal youth to all who eat them; the draught of oblivion, which effaces memory; the draught of memory, which restores it; the bird which speaks to Siegfried and leads him; the dragon into which Fafner transforms himself; the dragon's blood, which enables Siegfried to understand the language of birds; the fire which springs up around the sleeping Brunnhilda at the command of the fire-god Loki. It is well to have these relations and symbols clearly in mind in reading the successive parts of the drama. It will be a blazed path through the mazes and intricacies of the forest.

II

Those who wish to study the differences in the legends of the *Nibelungen Lied* and the *Nibelungen Ring*, and the way in which Wagner used his ancient material, are referred to Professor W. C. Sawyer's book on *Teutonic Legends*

Fore- word

in the Nibelungen Lied and the Nibelungen Ring, where the matter is treated in full detail. For a very thorough and clear analysis of The Ring as Wagner gives it, with a study of the musical motifs, probably nothing is better for general readers than the volume *The Epic of Sounds*, by Freda Winworth. The more scholarly work of Professor Lavignac is indispensable for the student of Wagner's dramas. There is much illuminating comment on the sources and materials in *Legends of the Wagner Drama* by J. L. Weston. One of the best literary appreciations of the ancient legends is the essay by Thomas Carlyle, under the title of the Nibelungen Ring. That stern old prophet and wonderful prose-poet was a lover of German literature and especially of this great drama of The Ring.

As to the argument of the story, it will also be best to get that clearly in mind as a whole before going into the details of the various parts. It will save much confusion.

In brief the whole story of The Ring is this: The Rhine-Gold tells how a hoard of gold exists in the depths of the Rhine, guarded by the innocent Rhine-maidens. Alberich, a dwarf, forswears love to gain this gold. He makes it into a magic ring. It gives him all power. He gathers by it a hoard of treasures. Meanwhile Wotan, chief of the gods, has engaged the giants to build for him a noble castle, Valhalla, from whence to rule the world. They build it and come for payment. He had promised to give to them Freya, goddess of youth and love. But now the gods find they cannot spare Freya, up-

on whom they depend for their immortal youth. Loki, the god of fire and god of cunning craft as well, must provide some substitute. He tells of Alberich's magic ring and other treasure. The giants agree to take this. Wotan goes with Loki, and they steal it from Alberich, who curses them and lays the curse upon all who shall henceforth possess it. On compulsion they give the magic ring and the treasures to the giants as a substitute for Freya. The curse begins. Fafner kills his brother to get all, and transforms himself into a dragon to guard the treasures and the ring. The gods enter Valhalla over the rainbow bridge.

The second part of the drama, called the Valkyrie, relates how Wotan still covets the ring. He cannot take it himself, for he has given his word to the giants. He stands or falls by his word. So he devises an artifice to get the ring. He will get a hero-race to work for him and recover the ring and the treasures. Siegmund and Sieglinda are twin children of this new race. Sieglinda is carried off as a child and is forced into marriage with Hunding. Siegmund comes, and unknowingly breaks the law of marriage, but wins Nothung, the great sword, and a bride. Brunnhilda, chief of the Valkyrie, is commissioned by Wotan at the instance of Fricka, goddess of marriage, to slay him for his sin. She disobeys and tries to save him, but Hunding, helped by Wotan, slays him. Sieglinda, however, about to bear the free hero, to be called Siegfried, is saved by Brunnhilda, and hid in the forest. Brunnhilda herself is punished by

Fore- being made a mortal woman. She is left sleep-
word ing on the mountains with a wall of fire around her which only a hero can penetrate.

The drama continues. The story of Siegfried opens with a scene in the smithy between Mime the dwarf and Siegfried. Mime is welding a sword, and Siegfried scorns him. Mime tells him something of his mother, Sieglinda, and shows him the broken pieces of his father's sword. Wotan comes and tells Mime that only one who has no fear can remake the sword. Now Siegfried knows no fear and soon remakes the sword Nothung. Wotan and Alberich come to where the dragon Fafner is guarding the ring. They both long for it, but neither can take it. Soon Mime comes bringing Siegfried with the mighty sword. Fafner comes out, but Siegfried slays him. Happening to touch his lips with the dragon's blood, he understands the language of the birds. They tell him of the ring. He goes and gets it. Siegfried now has possession of the ring, but it is to bring him nothing of happiness, only evil. It is to curse love and finally bring death. The birds also tell him of Mime's treachery. He slays Mime. He longs for some one to love. The birds tell him of the slumbering Brunnhilda. A little bird leads him on the way. Wotan, who has taken last counsel of Erda, opposes him and tests him, but sees that he is the true hero at last. Siegfried finds Brunnhilda, loves her, awakens her; she in bewilderment and joy gives herself to him, and the supreme lovers of the world find love's victory and love's ecstasy.

The Dusk of the Gods portrays at the opening the three norns or fates weaving and measuring the thread of destiny. It is the beginning of the end. The perfect pair, Siegfried and Brunnhilda, appear in all the glory of their life, splendid ideals of manhood and womanhood. But Siegfried goes out into the world to achieve deeds of prowess. He gives her the Nibelungen ring to keep as a pledge of his love till his return. Meanwhile Alberich also has begotten a son, Hagan, to achieve for him the possession of the ring. He is partly of the Gibichung race, and works through Gunther and Gutrune, half-brother and half-sister to him. They beguile Siegfried to them, give him a magic draught which makes him forget Brunnhilda and fall in love with Gutrune. Under this same spell, he offers to bring Brunnhilda for wife to Gunther. Now is Valhalla full of sorrow and despair. The gods fear the end. Wotan murmurs, "O that she would give back the ring to the Rhine." But Brunnhilda will not give it up,—it is now her pledge of love. Siegfried comes, takes the ring, and Brunnhilda is now brought to the Rhine castle of the Gibichungs, but Siegfried under the spell does not love her. She is to be wedded to Gunther. She rises in wrath and denounces Siegfried. But at a hunting banquet Siegfried is given another magic draught, remembers all, and is slain by Hagan by a blow in the back, as he calls on Brunnhilda's name in love. Then comes the end. The body of Siegfried is burned on a funeral pyre, a grand funeral march is heard, and Brunnhilda rides into the flames

**Fore-
word** and sacrifices herself for love's sake; the ring goes back to the Rhine-daughters; and the old world — of the gods and Valhalla, of passion and sin — is burnt up with flames, for the gods have broken moral law, and coveted power rather than love, gold rather than truth, and therefore must perish. They pass, and a new era, the reign of love and truth, has begun.

III

And now looking at the real significance of the drama, we may take The Nibelungen Ring in one of three ways. We may consider it merely as a retelling in splendid form of some of the greatest of the ancient legends of the Norse mythology. It then becomes a national epic of the Northern peoples, as the Iliad and Odyssey were the great epics of the Southern peoples. It is a great story, such as the childhood of the race loves. It is a mighty picture, or series of pictures, full of beauty, passion, pathos, tragedy, majesty. It has no hidden meanings. It is just a world-old legend that grew up in the poetic imagination of the people, or a legend cycle that developed around some ancient historic events.

Or we may take it as an ancient story rearranged by Richard Wagner to teach social and political lessons. In this view it is a great allegory of the political life of Europe in Wagner's day. It is a socialistic pamphlet, written in splendid poetic imagery. Such is Mr. Bernard Shaw's interpretation, in his book called The

Perfect Wagnerite. We may remember in this connection that Wagner was political revolutionist and socialistic philosopher, as well as poet and musician.

This view that *The Ring* is a drama of modern labor gives it an intensely vivid and contemporaneous interest. Against the background of the gods the mighty play is worked out, — the tyranny of capital, the swarming masses of the working-people, and the great ethical principles involved in the struggle are wonderfully shown. Here are some of the keynotes of the drama in lines here and there. See how modern they sound! "When you pant for power, little can your hard hearts know of holiness;" that is, love of money often smothers the soul. "To get power ye will trample in lawless contempt love and a woman's worth;" that is, all ideals, all love, is forsworn for gold. Again: "When to a ring this gold is fashioned, it grasps and holds the world;" that is, the ring is organized wealth, great corporations. "This tarnhelm makes invisible;" a board of directors is impersonal, irresponsible, invisible, — the corporation is soulless. "Unto him ye are slaves, ye must cringe and serve;" so gold speaks to the swarms of workers. "Lazy hounds, heap up my wealth, dig out my metal, melt it into bars!" so speaks a modern master of the mines, steel, copper, or coal. "Tremble in terror, O slaves, heed his rule who holds the ring!" that is, gold is king. But there is also another side shown here: "Beware of the host when the Nibelungs shall upheave from night to day;" that is, when the

Fore- labor world awakes and asserts itself. All this
word makes a tremendously strong parable. Lust of gold is shown as responsible for the loss of spiritual nature, ideals, love. It has brought cruelty, oppression, lying, robbery, murder. But it also brings the social upheaval which finally awakens the true ideals and ushers in the better day.

Or, finally, we may take the drama as veiling great spiritual and eternal truths, not put there by Wagner, but inherent in the great story itself and forever working themselves out into revelations in all the great legends and in all the great events of the world. In this last view there comes out the truth of the curse of the lust of power; the truth of the real supremacy of love; the truth of the inevitableness and eternity of the reign of moral law in the world.

Looking at the universal and eternal truths, therefore, the main idea of the whole Ring drama may be given in this one phrase: "To show the contrast of the two powers that rule the world, —the power of love and the power of gold." The chief thought in *The Rhine-Gold* is: "Base love of gold destroys golden love, and prophesies ruin and the curse." In *The Valkyrie*: "The reign of law, and the inevitableness of fate." In *Siegfried*: "Courage, born of innocence, outvies all cunning, and, inspired by love, conquers all things." In *The Dusk of the Gods*: "Ambition betrays itself, but love, through self-sacrifice, is supreme, and redeems the curse." Or we may see a little more fully in some such way as this: *The Rhine-Gold* is a parable of the

curse of gold. Innocent enough is gold itself ; it becomes a power and can become a curse when its inordinate love takes possession of the soul. Its love forsworn is sufficient to gain gold, but what is it all worth?

Fore-
word

The Valkyrie is a parable of the punishment of violated laws. There is a reign of law in the world. Whoso offends must suffer. It is inevitable. Heaven itself is subject to its divine laws.

Siegfried is a type of perfect innocence and goodness. This hero seems an embodiment of "summer and springtide, youth and strength, beauty and love." He is the highest ideal of a free hero, caring nothing for gold, possessing all things good in himself. Such a hero of light is at once attacked by envy and hate. So he falls a victim of the dark wiles, the embodiment of envy, hatred, and greed in the child of evil.

The Dusk of the Gods is a parable of the passing away of the ancient mythologies. As light came, as the ages went on, men saw that the old legends of the gods and goddesses, who played fast and loose with law, who broke covenants, could not remain. Moral law must be supreme. Love in self-sacrifice is the great revelation. Unworthy gods, annihilated by the principle of evil which they have introduced, — this is the meaning of the allegory where the gods are devoured by the fiery flames. Myth passed to make way for truth. The gods passed away to give place to God.

There are some perplexing ethical problems involved in the drama. The infidelity of Wotan, both to love and truth, are sad pictures of the

Fore- word

highest of the gods. The traditions, however, of Greek and Roman mythology are similar. The relations of Siegmund and Sieglinda have classic precedent among the gods, but are antagonistic to all our human instincts. The drama shows how love is superior to all law, and yet how the violation of law is inevitably punished. The greatest teaching of the drama is that love is supreme, but that the highest love is in full harmony with the highest law. In Browning's phrase, "All's love, yet all's law."

Richard Wagner's genius in all this great work is manifest. Ordinarily the Northern mythology has a curious interest for merely a few students and scholars. But the genius of Wagner, both in poetry and music, has brought this remote and mythical world to the living interest and ken of tens of thousands in all parts of the civilized world. German literature and the whole race owe much to him for this literary revival. But another debt we also owe to him. These old legends that grew up in most primitive ages from time to time found rude redactors, or editors, who endeavored to string the various legends together in continuous and harmonious narrative. Such was the ancient bard of the Nibelungen Lied. So in our own day Richard Wagner has performed a similar service, but in larger way and with more wonderful genius than any who has ever touched the legends. He found their unity and eternal significance and rearranged them to tell their greatest story for all time. Essentially this great fourfold drama is the drama of a primitive and pagan

era. It is an era long before Christianity, with no mention whatever of Greek, Roman, Jewish, or Christian gods or symbols. It is the atmosphere of ancient heathendom in the wilderness of most ancient Germany and Scandinavia. Nevertheless Richard Wagner makes the ancient story a modern revelation. This is a notable achievement. The great teaching of the supremacy of love, — was this in the ancient myths or thought of the primitive people? We cannot find it on the surface of the ancient legends. And yet Wagner has not read it into them, but rather unveiled it from them. He has so arranged his ancient material as to teach this universal and eternal truth, which only later and maturer understanding has made clear as being forever in the warp and woof of all human history and literature. As Wagner gives it, this drama is a great moral study, full of seriousness, conscience, and unending consequence. In this way the genius of Richard Wagner has given new vitality and significance to ancient myth and legend. He becomes an interpreter of humanity and a teacher of the greatest truths of life.

Fore-
word

OLIVER HUCKEL



PART I: DESTINY



DESTINY



PON a beetling cliff cloud-swept and
wild —

Forbidding spot, bare, desolate and
stern,

The rocky seat where the Valkyrie oft
Foregathered, ere they swooped on battle-
fields —

Were met the three weird sisters, called the
Norns.

Lofty in stature, clad in flowing black;
The oldest, gaunt and withered, crouched full
low

Under a heavy fir-tree's spreading boughs;
Another, grave as darkest destiny,
Was solemn stretched before a cave's black
mouth;

Huddled below the jagged peak of rock
That towered in sullen gloom, the youngest
bowed, —

Young, yet deep-wrinkled with eternity.
'T was night most heavy, but anon the flare
Of the far valley-fires lit up the gloom.
After long silence, motionless and dread,
The eldest Norn broke stillness with the
words:

"What light is this that flitteth through the
gloom?"

While spake her sister, peering with gaunt
eyes,

"Can it be glint of sun that dawns so soon?"
But answered them the third deep sombre
Norn:

"'T is Loki's host of flame that glows and leaps

Destiny Around the rocky fell. Yea, still 't is night.
Why spin we not, and chant our songs of fate?"
One sister asked: "But while we spin and
sing,
Whereon may we outstretch our mystic
thread?"
E'en as she spake, the eldest from herself
Unwound the golden thread, and to a bough
Of fir-tree tied it, as she slowly sang:

"**F**OR weal or woe to serve
Winding the thread, sing I;
Around the world's ash-tree
Of old I wove my spells;
Forth spreading far and wide
Outstretching from its roots
A tangled forest grew.
In cooling shadows rose
A fountain, purling soft,
And whisp'ring wisdom came
Forth floating on its waves.
My mystic song I sang.
A dauntless god came forth
To sip the fountain's lore;
For this thrice peerless boon
He gave his vision's orb,
Quenching its crystal light.
Yea, from the world's ash-tree
A bough great Wotan wrenched,
And with fierce sturdy strokes
He shaped it for a shaft
Of his almighty spear.
As time grew old, the wound
Cankered within the tree;

Leafless and sere it grew,
And withered unto death.
Then sadly ebb'd the stream
And fail'd the fountain's flow,
And darksome grew my song
And heavy with its grief.
Beside the world's ash-tree
No more I weave my spells,
The slender fir-tree's girth
Must hold my mystic thread.
Sing, O my sister, sing,
And wind the thread of fate!
Thou knowest what befell?"

Then snatched the second Norn the mystic
thread
And wound it thrice around a jutting rock,
Close to the cave's great mouth, and slowly
sang:

"Strong runes of mighty truth,
For holy treaties writ,
Wotan erstwhile graved deep
Upon his spear's great shaft:
And thus he swayed the world.
But now a hero bold
In flight has broke his spear,
In splinters shattered shaft
And all the sacred runes.
Then Wotan straightway bade
Valhalla's warriors come
And hew the ash-tree down,
Cleave off its withering boughs,
Root out its worthless stem.
So died the world's ash-tree,

Destiny

So failed the fount of life. —
Now round the sharp-edged rock
I wind the mystic thread.
Sing, O my sister, sing!
Thou knowest what befell?"

Quickly the third Norn caught the mystic
thread,
Behind her threw the end, and slowly sang:

"The castle wondrous stands
By giants' hands upraised:
Walk gods and heroes there;
A hallowed mighty host;
Great Wotan sits in state.
A lofty group of trees
Of bare and riven boughs
Like mighty circling wall
Rangeth Valhalla round;
Once 't was the world's ash-tree.
Ah, when a burning brand
Shall light its withering wood,
Then shall the angry flames
Feed on these glittering halls:
Soon comes the end of all,
The downfall of the gods! —
Know ye the further fate?
Then wind the thread again:
From northward now I cast
The mystic thread to thee, —
Spin, sister, spin and sing!"

Deftly she snatched and threw the mystic
thread,
And that weird sister who was eldest-born

Tied it upon the fir-bough, as she crooned:

Destiny

“Doth now the daylight dawn,
Or flickers still the fire?
Sorrow hath dimmed my sight;
Nor can my vision ken
The wondrous deed of old, —
When Loki long ago
Burst forth in lambent flame! —
Wist thou what happened next?”

Whereat a sister Norn quick answered her:

“By magic of his spear
Wotan thrall'd Loki's power;
And held him as his slave;
But from the fetter's gall
He struggled to be free,
And gnawed the shaft's deep runes;
Then with the spear's dread point
Wotan bound him in spell
To girdle with his flames
Brunnhilda's hiding-place. —
And what will now befall?”

And taking up the song and spinning fast,
Another sister wound the thread, and sang:

“With spear-shaft cloven sore
And splintered utterly,
Wotan shall wound full deep
Sly Loki's quiv'ring breast.
Then shall the wound flame forth
And kindle all the shaft
Which Wotan shall out-fling
Upon the world's ash-tree, —

A heap of riven boughs. —
And what befalleth then,
Would ye, O sisters, know,
Swift wind, O wind, the thread!"

And as they wound and twisted and unwound
The thread of fate, another sister crooned:

"The night is waning fast
And vision fades away.
I cannot feel the strands
Of this sad mystic thread;
'T is tangled and unloosed, —
A scene of utter woe
Assails and wounds my eyes, —
I see the Rhine-gold rape,
I see swart Alberich, —
Wist thou what came thereof?"

And one of the weird sisters answer made:

"The crag with jagged edge
Hath cut my mystic thread:
The tale is broken off
And cut the thread of fate, —
Ravelled and frayed it hangs.
Through wrath and wrong I see
The Nibelung's dread Ring:
A fierce avenging curse
Gnaweth my mystic thread.
Wist ye what cometh next?"

Quickly another Norn took up the song:

"The thread is growing slack,
I cannot reach it now:
Should it be stretched anew, —

To northward far be cast?
Straighter must it be drawn,—
It breaks! O woe, it breaks!”

Destiny

Alarmed, they shrieked, and seized the broken
threads

And bound them to their bodies, close around,
And with them lashed themselves together
tight,

While with a deep despairing wail they
crooned:

“Here ends our wisdom’s word,—
No more the eager world
Shall listen to our speech!
To Erda let’s away!”

They spake and vanished, and the night was
gone,

For radiant sunrise gleamed upon the mount.

NOW while the glory of the morning
broke,

It chanced that Siegfried and Brunnhilda fair
Wended their way to the Valkyrie’s rock,
And reached eftsoon the dark cave’s gaping
mouth;

Bold Siegfried was full clad in glittering mail,
Brunnhilda by a bridle led her horse

And soft she spake: “Beloved hero mine,
Forth must I send thee unto hero-deeds;
Selfish my love if I should hold thee here.

One fear alone doth make me loath and slow:
’Tis lest thy heart should not be wholly mine.

What the gods taught me, freely gave I thee,—

Destiny

The richest hoard of wise and heavenly lore;
And all my strength of matchless maidenhood,
This also thou hast stolen with my love.
My godhood fails, but boundless love remains:
Too rich in love, while weak in godlike power,
Perchance thou wilt disdain this earthly worth,
For she who granted all, can give no more!"

But Siegfried, full of glowing love, replied:
"Wonder of women, thou hast given dower
And largess more than I can comprehend:
So chide me not, if spite of all thy lore
So gracious taught me, I am still unlearned;
Only one thing my heart full well has learned, —
One blessed thing, — for me Brunnhilda lives!
'T were happy task to learn that lesson
blest, —
To know Brunnhilda and to worship her!"

Most eagerly Brunnhilda looked and spake:
"Wouldst thou enkindle fondest love in me,
Recall thy prowess and thy dauntless deeds!
Remember that fierce furnace of the flames
Which, with a fearless heart, thou didst defy, —
Around the fell it flowed in billowy seas —"

Broke in bold Siegfried's fond and joyous
words:

"I fought to win Brunnhilda for mine own!"

But she continued: "Yea, recall that maid,
Shield-covered, and in magic slumber thrall'd,
Whose fastened mail and helm thou didst
break through —"

Cried Siegfried: "My Brunnhilda to awake!" **Destiny**

Then on she went in happy reverie:
"Recall the pledges of our plighted troth;
And all the sacred vows that made us one;
Remember the deep love in which we live;
Ponder these things, breathe in their happy
glow;
Then shall thy bride Brunnhilda hold her place,
Forever hallowed in thy loving heart!"

Exultant in his love, young Siegfried cried:
"My own beloved, ere I leave thee here
Within this fastness of defending fire,
I give to thee as counter for thy runes
This Ring, true guerdon of our holy troth;
The valiant deeds my hands have wrought for
thee
Were born by virtue of this golden ring;
Which to make mine my blade the dragon slew,
Who long in heavy hate had guarded it;
Now, my beloved, treasure well this ring, —
It is my wedding gift unto my bride!"

With pleasure glowing, fair Brunnhilda placed
The golden charm upon her hand, and cried:
"Yea, I will guard it with my very life, —
Never shall it be wrested from my hand;
And for my pledge to thee, take thou my steed:
Erstwhile with me he winged the ambient air,
But now his wondrous gifts with mine have
fled:
No more through furious clouds and tempest's
roar

Destiny His course impetuous shall he boldly speed;
Yet wheresoe'er on earth thy way shall trend,
E'en though it be through barriers of flame,
My good steed Grani fearless carries thee.
Henceforth he serves thee only, Hero mine!
O ward him well, He knows thy voice, and
heeds.
O greet him oft with thy Brunnhilda's name!"

Most gladly Siegfried spake, eyes lit with love:
"By thy fair virtue I will do my deeds!
My battles thou shalt choose, my triumphs
win!
If on thy valiant steed I fight, and with thy
shield
I shelter me, Siegfried am I no more,
But truly fair Brunnhilda's stalwart arm!"

Then she: "O would I were thy very life!"

And gallantly he cried with all his heart:
"Thou art my life! Thou spurrest my soul on!"

And she, with laugh like music, spake in glee:
"Then wert thou Siegfried and Brunnhilda
twain!"

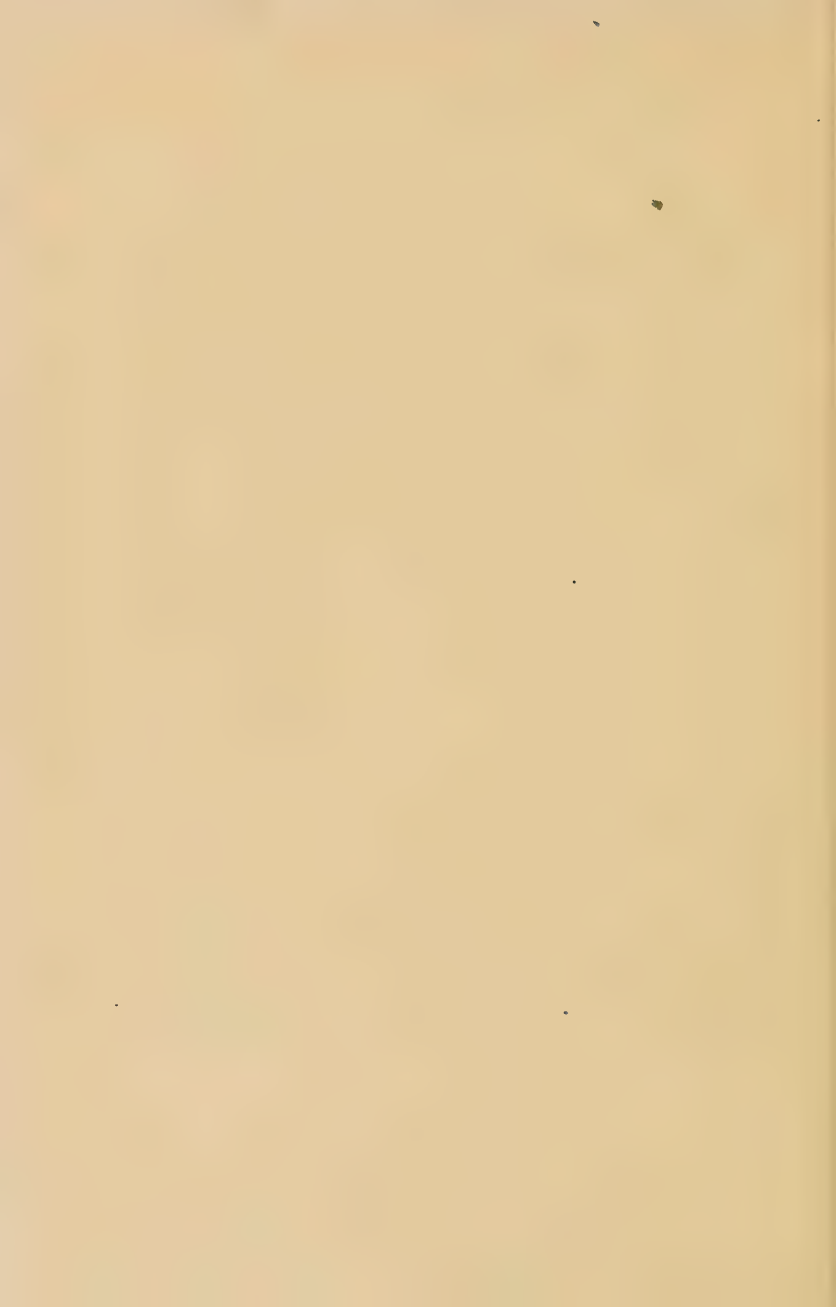
And he: "Yea, where I am, thy heart doth beat."

And with a happy smile, she archly asked:
"My rocky crag, is it deserted then?"

But with a shout of triumph Siegfried cried:
"Nay, both our hearts are still by fire engirt!"



BRUNHILDE BIDS SIEGFRIED FAREWELL



Therewith exultant rapture stirred her soul, **Destiny**
And stretching to the o'erbending sky her
hands,
Brunnhilda cried: "O heavenly gods, behold!
Race of eternal, hither turn your gaze,
Behold our heavenly joy, and love sublime!
Apart, — what power can separate our hearts?
Divided, — we are one for evermore!"

Gazing upon her face, fond Siegfried cried:
"Hail, O Brunnhilda, brightest of all stars!
Hail, radiant stream of rapturous love divine!"

In loving passion, glad she answered him:
"Hail to thee, Siegfried, light victorious!
Hail, radiant stream of all our conquering life!"

Each answered each: "Hail, and all hail, to
thee!"

As Siegfried led his steed a-down the rocks
With many a loving backward glance at her,
And many a handwave in a fond farewell.
Long time Brunnhilda watched him in her joy
And eager listened for his plaintive horn,
Resounding in the valley far away, —
At last the echoes fainter grew, then ceased,
And fair Brunnhilda clasped her hands and
wept.

BEHOLD, o'er rolling meadows and far
hills,
Beyond the forest wilderness, there rose
A wondrous castle on the lordly Rhine,
The ancient halls of the fierce Gibich folk.

Destiny Within the Knights-hall on a splendid throne
Sat Gunther, king of all this mighty realm,
And his fair sister, Gutrune, golden-tressed.
Before them was a banquet board full graced
With many brimming flagons, and in front
Lolled Hagen, a half-brother to the king.

Spake Gunther: "Hear me, Hagen, speak me
true!

Think ye my fame and lordship on the Rhine
Is worthy of great Gibich's lordly race?"

And Hagen answered: "Yea, thy glory's fame
Awakes my deepest envy; well thou kennst
That she who gave us both our span of life,
The good Grimhilda, told for thee great things,
And bade me curb my growing jealousy."

But Gunther laughed and quickly made re-
sponse:

"'Tis I who envy, not thou enviest me!
Though I am heir to all the first-born's rights,
Yet thy keen dower was heritage of wit.
Half-brothers never better ended strife;
For 't is thy wisdom keen I compliment
When thus I ask thee of my name and fame."

And Hagen slily added with a smile:
"My wits I oft do blame that thy renown
Fails in one thing. I ken of treasures rare
That ye, great Gibich twain, have never won."

And Gunther, in amaze, looked in his face and
cried:

"Speak, tell me of them, or I blame thee sore." **Destiny**

Smiling again in cunning Hagen spake:

"I see the noble offspring of our race,
Like radiance of summer, strong and ripe,
Yet Gunther does not wed, and Gutrune finds
no mate."

Said Gunther: "True, but where is mate for me
Who could enhance for me my name and
fame?"

Slowly spake Hagen: "Such a woman lives,
The noblest and the rarest in the world;
Her far-off home is on a mountain crag
Around which leaps a barrier of flame;
He only who dares storm that fiery wall
Can win the fair Brunnhilda."

Gunther asked:

"Is not my prowess equal to such task?"

But Hagen shook his head, and grimly cried:
"Nay, for a stronger one it is decreed."

Cried Gunther: "Who is he, this stronger one?"

Then Hagen paused a moment ere he cried:

"'T is Siegfried, offspring of the Volsung race;
The strongest hero of the world is he.

'T was twin-born Siegmund and Sieglinda fair
Who thrall'd in love begat this wondrous son;
In forest deep, stalwart and strong he grew, —
Him for our Gutrune would I choose as mate."

Destiny Eager asked Gutrune: "Pray, what hath he wrought.
So great that foremost hero stands he forth?"

And Hagen answered: "Once the dragon grim
Guarded at Hate-Cave the Nibelung's vast
hoard;
Siegfried those threatening jaws forever closed,
And slew the monster with his conquering
sword;
This wondrous deed first won him hero's fame."

Spake Gunther: "Of this Nibelung's great
hoard
Oft have I heard. Is it a treasure vast?"

And Hagen answered: "Yea, who knows its
worth,
He to his will bends all the mighty world."

Again asked Gunther: "And this treasure-
hoard, —
Did Siegfried gain it by his might alone?"

Spake Hagen: "By the Nibelungs, his thralls."

Yet still he asked: "And this fire-circled maid, —
Can he alone Brunnhilda win for bride?"

And Hagen answered with a knowing smile:
"Yea, no one else can tame the maddened
flames
But him alone whose soul shall feel no fear."

Then Gunther angry rose and fiercely cried: **Destiny**
"Why dost thou waken discord and dark doubt!
Why dost thou stir my heart with deep desire
For treasure I may never hope to win?"

But Hagen spake: "What if there were a
way, —
If Siegfried brought the blushing bride to thee,
Couldst thou not make Brunnhilda thus thine
own?"

Then Gunther strode the echoing hall in
thought,
And doubting mused: "How could I ever force
The dauntless Siegfried to win bride for me?"

And Hagen answered: "By thy very plea,
Thy wishes would be wrought, if first of all,
Gutrune had woven spells about his heart."

Then out spake princess Gutrune with a laugh:
"Thou scoffest, evil Hagen, mocking me!
For could I bind great Siegfried by my wiles?
If he be lordliest hero of the world,
Surely the fairest woman of the world
Long since has bound him captive to her love."

But Hagen closer came, and low he spake:
"Remember that dark drink in yonder shrine,
And trust to me, who brought its magic here.
The hero whom thou choosest for thine own
'T will bind in love's strong fetters unto thee.
Should Siegfried come and taste the magic
draught,

Destiny Straightway he would forget that he had seen
Or known a woman, ere he looked on thee.
Speak now, how like ye Hagen's crafty
scheme?"

And Gunther, who had listened eagerly,
Leaning upon the table, loud exclaimed:
"All praises to Grimhilda, mother dear,
For giving us a brother of such wit."

While Gutrune, overjoyed, cried with a sigh,
"Ah, would I might see Siegfried hither come!"

Then Gunther asked: "But where can he be
found?"

Spake Hagen: "Even now he spurs his steed,
And hies him forth on courses of renown:
The world he sweeps as if a mighty wood:
Be sure his restless roamings soon will drive
His footsteps to our castle on the Rhine."

And Gunther cried: "Right welcome shall he
be. —
Hark! listen, from the Rhine a horn I hear."

And as they listened, Siegfried's silvery notes
Were heard upon the river. Faint the sounds;
Then greater grew to clearness, and at last
Hagen, who scanned the river, shouted forth:
"I see a craft, and on it man and horse;
The warrior blows his horn right merrily! —
With wondrous stroke and unexerting arm
He drives the boat against the rushing stream;

Such mighty strength one man alone re- **Destiny**
veals, —

That hero who once slew the dragon grim:
Siegfried it is, — none other can he be!"

Asked Gunther: "Comes he here, or up the
stream?"

And Hagen put his two hands to his mouth
And through this hollowed trumpet shouted
loud:
"Ho! ho! whom seekest thou, hero renowned?"

Still on the river Siegfried's voice replied:
"I seek the son of Gibich's mighty race!"

Then Hagen shouted: "See, here are his halls!
I bid thee welcome! Hither! Come ashore!
Hail, Siegfried! Hail and welcome! Hero
brave!"

And Siegfried came to land, while at the shore
Gunther with Hagen stood to welcome him.
And Gutrune saw the hero from afar,
And with a glad intentness gazed on him,
Spell-bound, but as the men approached the
hall

She slowly passed, all visibly confused,
And sought her own apartments, eyes abased.
Then Siegfried, who had led his steed to land
And leaned against him, quietly exclaimed:
"Pray tell me which is Gibich's mighty son?"

And Gunther boldly answered in his pride:

Destiny "Gunther am I, whom doubtless thou dost seek."

Spake Siegfried: "Oft thy mighty fame and name

Have come to me beyond the flowing Rhine.
Now fight with me, or else stand fast as friend."

But Gunther spake with cheery words and gay:
"I will not fight thee; thou art welcome here."

Asked Siegfried: "Where is stable for my horse?"

And Hagen spake: "That charge shall be mine own."

Asked Siegfried: "Have we met in days gone by?

Thou seemest well to know my fame and name."

But with a bow, sly Hagen answered him:
"T was by thy wondrous strength I knew thy name."

And Siegfried smiled and said: "Treat Grani well!

For never hast thy hand a bridle held
For steed of nobler strain."

So Hagen took
The steed away, and quickly came again;
While Gunther led great Siegfried by the arm

Into the lordly hall, and proudly spake:

"O hero, gaily greet these ancient halls
Where dwelt my fathers. Where thy feet shall
walk

And whatsoe'er thine eyes shall here behold,
That bid I thee hold henceforth as thine own, —
My heritage, my lands, my bounden slaves,
I swear it by my body, are thine own,
And Gunther's self I freely give to thee."

And Siegfried full as proudly answered him:
"Not land nor slaves have I to offer thee,
Nor hall that straight descends from son to
son;

My sole inheritance my stalwart limbs:
And these I only hold by living use:
Yet a keen blade I have, self-forged and rude,
And by this sword I swear my fealty,
This blade and all my strength shall be thine
own."

Behind them, Hagen, standing, croaked the
words:

"Yet rumor nameth thee the mighty lord
Of all the Nibelung's vast golden wealth."

Spake Siegfried: "Yea, that treasure I forgot,
So lightly have I prized its glittering worth!
I left it lying in the cave's dark depths
Where once the monster-dragon guarded it."

Asked Hagen: "Hast thou taken naught from
thence?"

And Siegfried pointed to a curious cap,

Destiny Strange net-work, wrought of many chains of steel,
That hung upon his belt, and careless spake:
"Naught but this cap, whose use I do not know."

Spake Hagen: "'Tis the Tarnhelm,—that I ken,—
Most strange of all the Nibelung's weird work;
It has the power when set upon thy head
To turn thee into any shape thou wilt;
Perchance to far-off lands thou wouldst be gone,
Quick it transports thee there at thy desire,—
But hast thou nothing more from that vast hoard?"

And Siegfried answered lightly, "Yea, a Ring."

"Dost wear it now?" cried Hagen, eagerly.

And Siegfried answered, triumph in his eyes:
"'Tis worn by sweetest woman in the world."

"Brunnhilda!" muttered Hagen to himself.

Now Gunther cried: "Naught shall great Siegfried pledge:
Mere dross could I for all his treasure give.
Though he should win from me my vaunted wealth,
Yet without guerdon shall I serve him well."

And as they talked, Hagen to Gutrune went

With secret counsel of the mystic draught; **Destiny**
And through the open door she slowly came,
A well-filled drinking-horn within her hands,
And spake: "Welcome, O guest, to Gibich's
house,
And from its daughter take this cooling cup."

And Siegfried grateful bowed and took the
horn,
Held it a little while and softly mused:
"Though all thy gifts to me were else forgot,
This one dear thing I never shall forget, —
So let me now remember faithful love, —
Brunnhilda, my belov'd, I drink to thee!"

He drank, and gave the horn to Guttrune's
hands,
While she, abashed, cast down her tender eyes.
O fatal drink of deep oblivion,
Strange baneful magic and dark destiny,
O death to faithful love and memory,
Cup of black tragedy, of quenchless curse,
The dregs of bitterest woe are hid in thee!
For in a moment Siegfried started up,
And in his blood the magic draught ran fierce.
He fixed on her his eyes aflame with love,
And passion swiftly kindling, fierce he cried:
"O fairest one, whose radiant beams of love
Have all enflamed my breast with passion
deep,
Why do thine eyes sink down before mine
own?"

Thereat her eager blood coursed mantling up;

Destiny She raised her eyes and blushed, as still he cried:

“Ha! sweetest maid, now veil these burning beams!

For thee is all aflame my tortured heart;
My blood in fiery streams is scorching me.
Gunther, I pray, what is thy sister’s name?”

And low he answered: “Gutrune is she called.”

Cried Siegfried: “True! these are ‘good runes’
that now
I read within the glory of her eyes.”

With ardor fierce impetuous he seized
Her trembling hand, and earnestly he spake:
“Gladly had I served Gunther long and well,
But his strange pride refused my proffered
aid;—
Wilt thou, like him, be arrogant to me,
Should I make offer of my heart and hand?”

Now as he spake, Gutrune looked far away,
But suddenly met Hagen’s meaning glance;
She bowed her head most humbly, and with
signs,
Expressing that she felt unworthiness,
She left the hall with slow and trembling steps.

Siegfried gazed after her, entranced, enthralled,
While Hagen and lord Gunther watched him
close;
Then asked he: “My lord Gunther, hast thou
wife?”

“Nay,” answered Gunther, “wedded am I not, **Destiny**
And for a wife it seemeth vain to seek,
For I have fixed my heart on such an one
As never deed of mine can win for me.”

Then Siegfried quickly turned to him and said:
“Why shouldst thou fail, if I stood as thy
friend?”

But Gunther spake: “On mountain heights
her home,
And round it leaps a barrier of flame.”

Whereat in wondering mood, and seeking hard
The long past to recall, Siegfried spake slow
The selfsame words: “On mountain heights
her home,
And round it leaps a barrier of flame!”

While Gunther added: “Who breaks through
the flames—”

Then Siegfried interrupted in amaze,
And soft repeated: “Who breaks through the
flames—”

Continued Gunther: “Shall Brunnhilda win.”

But at that name,—Brunnhilda,—once so dear,
Name with all magic in it for his heart,
To set his blood a-tingling with delight,
Now by a silent gesture, Siegfried showed
That all remembrance was effaced and dead.

Destiny Spake Gunther: "To that crag I dare not
come, —
For me the wall of fire will never down."

But Siegfried eager started up and cried:
"No fire fear I; let me win bride for thee,
For I am thine, my stalwart arm is thine,
If only I may have Gutrune to wife."

And Gunther promised: "Gutrune shall be
thine."

While Siegfried swore: "And thine Brunnhilda
is!"

Asked Gunther: "With what spells wilt thou
beguile?"

And Siegfried smiling spake: "By Tarnhelm's
craft,
I shall assume thine image for the deed."

Then Gunther: "Let us swear it by an oath."

And Siegfried quick agreed: "Yea, let it be
A brotherhood by blood, and bound by vow."

So Hagen filled a drinking-horn with wine
And held it for them. With their own keen
swords

They pricked their arms, and let the ruddy
drops

Mix with the rosy wine within the horn,
Saying together this time-honored oath:

“THE living blood
In blooming flood
Into this cup we pour,
And boldly brew
A friendship true
To blossom evermore;

“Oath of true friends
That never ends
For all things fair and good;
This drink divine
Of blood and wine
A true blood-brotherhood.

“Who breaks this oath
Or fails in faith
While he hath life and breath;
His blood shall be
The penalty
Poured out unto his death!

“So swear we solemn oath,
So drink we now our troth.”

Then each in turn drank half the blood-red
draught,
And Hagen, who, while oaths were plighted,
stood
Apart, now slowly came and took the horn
And with his sword he cleft it into shreds;
While Siegfried and lord Gunther clasped the
hands
Each of the other in eternal pact.

Destiny Then Siegfried spake to Hagen wond'ringly:
"Why tookest thou no part in this blood
troth?"

And Hagen curtly said: "My blood were bane
To spoil your drink. It flows not pure and free
Like yours. 'Tis stubborn, cold, and scarcely
stirs.

My cheek is never reddened by its glow;
Hence do I hold aloof from vows of blood."

Spake Gunther: "Give his churlish spleen no
heed."

And all alert for deeds, Siegfried exclaimed:
"Forth let us fare! There lies my faithful skiff;
Swift let us journey to the fire-walled rock.
Wait with the craft one night upon the shore,
The next, I promisethee thy wished-for bride!"

But Gunther spake: "Wilt thou not first take
rest?"

"When I return, I rest;" bold Siegfried cried;
And quickly sought the river and his boat.

While Gunther, with a cry to Hagen: "Ho!
Thou Hagen, keep a ward o'er hearth and
home!"

Swift followed Siegfried to the river-bank.

And as they went, fair Guttrune to the door
Of her dark chamber eager came and asked:
"O whither hasten they so fast away?"

And Hagen answered with a knowing look: Destiny
"To boat, to get Brunnhilda as a bride!"

And Gutrune anxious asked: "For Siegfried's
bride?"

But Hagen answered, pointing to the stream
Where Siegfried bent the oar with stalwart
arm,
Each stroke a wonder: "Nay, watch how he
speeds—
So would he haste to win thee for his wife!"

He spake, and sat him down before the hall
With spear and shield. But Gutrune, deeply
moved,
Sought once again her chamber, murmuring:
"Siegfried, my own, — Siegfried, my very own!"

After long silence, Hagen spake once more:
"Here sit I watching, warding the great hall
And guarding this strong castle from its
foes;

While gentle winds are wafting Gibich's son
As forth unto his wooing fares he far.
His helm is guided by a hero strong
Whose stalwart soul all perils dares to brave:
For Gunther he will win his own fair bride
And with her he will bring for me the Ring! —
Ye gallant men, ye joyous comrades true,
Sail on, sail on, fare merrily your way!
Ye are my minions both! Ye deem me base,
But ye shall serve me, Nibelung's true son!"

MEANWHILE upon the high Valkyrie's
rock

Before a yawning cave Brunnhilda mused
In happy thought. She looked on Siegfried's
Ring

And by the memories of joy o'erwhelmed,
She covered it with kisses. Suddenly
She seemed to hear far-off a well-known sound:
And listened eagerly, and joyous spake:
"I hear the dear familiar sounds of yore:
They bring most gladsome greetings to my ear;
A wingèd steed speeds hither on its course;
Storming it sweeps the clouds and nears this
crag!

Who is it seeks my loneliness to break?"

And from afar Valtrauta's voice was heard:
"Brunnhilda, sister, from thy slumber wake!"

While starting from her seat, Brunnhilda cried:
"Welcome Valtrauta's call, most joyous sound!
Comest thou, sister, here to trace me out?
Straightway descend, and leave thy wingèd
steed

There in the woods as always was thy wont.
How darest thou to come? How darest thou,
Forbid, bring greetings to a maid accurs'd?"

Quick from the woods Valtrauta eager came,
While after her a sound like thunder rolled,—
Unnoted by Brunnhilda's beaming joy,
But filling faint Valtrauta's heart with fear,
While in a whisper hastily she spake:
"It is for thee, — this headlong haste of mine!"

With sudden joy, Brunnhilda grateful cried: **Destiny**
"O didst thou dare, for thy Brunnhilda's sake,
To break the grim War-Father's awful bar?
Or else perchance, — O tell me, is it so —
Wotan's hard thought has softened unto me?
So hot his wrath when Siegmund did I shield,
And yet forsooth my deed fulfilled his wish.
His anger now is ended, — well I know.
For though in sleep he sealed my closing eyes,
And left me here upon this mountain crag
To be the slave of him who wakened me,
Yet did he not deny my earnest prayer!
He walled the fell with fierce and ravening fire
To bar all cravens from my place of sleep.
So from my sentence fairest blessing came, —
The world's great hero won me for his bride,
And in his light and love I live in bliss.
Dear sister, wert thou lured here by my fate,
Thus wouldst thou also feed upon my joys,
And share the pleasures of my new-found life?"

But, sorrowful, Valtrauta answered her:
"Share in the frenzied madness of thy brain? —
Nay; other matters big with awful doom
Have driven me to break great Wotan's ban!"

Brunnhilda cried: "'T is anxious dread and
fear
That hold in fetter thy faint-hearted soul.
So the Strong-Father hath not pardoned me,
And dost thou fear the Great Avenger's wrath?"

Valtrauta answered: "If I feared it not,
Then other awful things would I not dread."

Destiny Brunnhilda spake: "Thy words bewilder me."

But with an anxious face, Valtrauta cried:
"Calm now thy heart, and listen well to me.
For to Valhalla terror drives me back,
As from Valhalla late it drove me forth."

Then in alarm Brunnhilda asked: "Tell me
What dreadful doom has fallen on the gods?"

And full of haste and fear Valtrauta spake:
"Hearken and heed what I shall tell to thee!
Since that day when great Wotan from thee
turned

No more to battle hath he sent us; dazed
With fear, bewildered have we coursed the
skies;

Nor doth the great War-Father as of yore
Gather Valhalla's heroes round his board.
But, solitary on his steed, distraught,
He swept as Wanderer through the wide
world.

At length one day beheld his sad return
Fast holding to a cleft and splintered spear
By a bold hero shattered into shreds.
Then in unutterable silence made he sign
To all the heroes in Valhalla's halls
To strike and hew to death the world's ash-
tree.

At the dread sign the stem was riven down,
And the rough branches stacked and heaped
up high,
Like circling barrier round the immortal
mount.

Then into council called he all the gods,
And on his sacred throne he took his seat.
Dismayed, they all assembled at his word
And round him mighty heroes filled the hall. —
So, in an awful stillness, sits he now,
All mute and motionless on his high throne.
The shattered spear still rests between his
hands;

Fair Freya's golden apples are untouched;
Awe-struck, the gods are shivering in woe.
Forth he hath sent his ravens on a quest;
If they shall bring good tidings back to him,
Then a last smile shall light the god's wan
face.

Now we Valkyrie twine about his knees
Cowering with fear, but to our begging eyes
He pays no heed, and we are all consumed
With terror ominous and dark despair.
Weeping, I threw myself on his great breast,
And soft his look became, as if, forsooth,
He was rememb'ring thee, Brunnhilda dear!
He closed his eyes, and oft he deeply sighed;
Then as in slumber murmured softly thus:—
'That day when the fair daughters of the Rhine
Shall win again from her the magic Ring,
That day the heavy doom and awful curse
Shall lift from gods and men and all the
world!'—

Then pondered I, and quickly from his side
I stole, threading my way among the gods;
And with all haste bestrode my faithful steed,
And galloped here to thee. Now, sister mine,
I supplicate thee—do what thou canst do!
Dare to fulfil the gifts within thy power,

Destiny And end this mighty sorrow of the gods!"
She spake, and at Brunnhilda's feet she fell.

But fair Brunnhilda, looking at her, said:
"What evil dreams of far-off mystery
Thou tellest me, thou sad and mournful one!
From that far cloudy heaven of the gods
Have I, poor fool, thrust out, made glad escape,
So that I scarcely grasp what thou dost tell.
Both dark and wild thy poor speech seems to
me,
And in thine over-weary eyes there gleams
A fitful wavering fire by frenzy lit.
O piteous sister, with thy wild, wan face,
What would thy madness hope to gain from
me!"

Rousing herself, Valtrauta fiercely cried:
"There on thy hand's the Ring, — that cursed
Ring —
'T is that! O hear my pleading for the Ring!
For Wotan's sake, cast off the Ring, I plead!"

But in amaze Brunnhilda loudly cried,
Full of great grief: "The Ring! Cast off my
Ring?"

Valtrauta pleaded: "Yea, O cast it off!
And fling it to the daughters of the Rhine!"

Then cried Brunnhilda, kissing fierce the
Ring:
"The daughters of the Rhine — my precious
Ring —

My Siegfried's bridal gift and pledge of love?— **Destiny**
Sister, what mad thought wanders in thy
brain?"

Yet still Valtrauta pleaded: "List to me!
And heed the gods' distress. The world's wild
waves

Are stirred up by the curse upon the Ring.
Cast it far from thee into the Rhine's depths,
And thou shalt end Valhalla's awful woe.
O hurl the Ring accurs'd into the flood!"

But deeply stirred Brunnhilda fierce outcried:
"Ha! wist thou what this Ring doth mean to
me?

How canst thou know who never love hast
known!

More than all raptures of Valhalla's joys,
More than the weal or woe of all the gods,
Is this my Ring! One glance of its bright gold,
One flashing moment of its holy fire,
Is more to me than all the deathless gods
And all the years of their immortal joy.
For shining on this Ring is Siegfried's love,
Dear Siegfried's love, — would that my words
could tell

Its wondrous bliss, — still glowing on the Ring!
Nay, get thee hence to the sad, silent gods
Gathered in holy council. Tell to them
This word about my Ring: my Ring's my love,
And never shall I turn me from my love, —
And never shall they rob me of my love, —
Nay, sooner would these eyes of mine behold
Valhalla's splendor crumble into dust!"

Destiny Valtrauta cried: "Is this thy faithfulness?
Unloving, leaving me in direst woe?"

But fiercely cried Brunnhilda, deeply moved:
"Swiftly to horse and quickly speed away,
For never canst thou win the Ring from me."

And in despair Valtrauta wildly wailed:
"Woe's me! Woe's me! Woe, sister, woe to
thee!

Woe to Valhalla and the immortal gods!"
She spake and rushed away, and from the wood
She rose like storm-cloud, and the thunder
broke.

And gazing after her, Brunnhilda cried:
"O flashing storm-cloud, borne on the swift
wind,
Begone, and never more come back to me!"

AND now gray evening came and twilight
dusk
Grew heavier and darker in the vale,
And far below, the walls of fire leaped bright
With fiercer flaming as the darkness grew.
Softly Brunnhilda murmured as she gazed:
"Fair evening's twilight veils the heaven's face,
But brighter gleams my faithful guarding fire;
Yet wherefore leap the flames so wildly now
As if they surged against advancing foes,
The fiery sea girts all the mountain round!"

Far from the vale a horn's clear note was heard
And radiant in joy Brunnhilda cried:

"'T is Siegfried! 'T is my Siegfried come to me! **Destiny**
That horn, — it is his call within my heart!
Up heart, to meet him! To be gathered close
Enfolded in the arms of my strong god!"

Exultant in her joy, she hurried forth.
Upon the rocky way to meet her lord.
The red flames leaped like mountains tower-
ing high,
And from their fiery flood Siegfried sprang
forth,
But all unlike himself, for on his head
He wore the tarnhelm, changing his great form,
And making him like Gunther, Gibich's son.

And full dismayed Brunnhilda wildly cried:
"I am betrayed! Tell me what man thou art!"

But leaning on his shield, all motionless,
Awhile he watched her, ere he spake to her,
And then with feigned and rougher voice he
said:

"Brunnhilda, see! a wooer comes from far,—
One whom thy walls of fire cannot affright.
I dare to woo and claim thee for my bride!
Now wilt thou freely yield and follow me!"

But trembling with affright Brunnhilda cried:
"Who art thou that undaunted darest the deed
For which but one in all the world hath
strength?"

Then he, still standing off, roughly replied:
"A hero who shall break thy proud disdain,

Destiny If force hath any power to bend the will."

And filled with horror fair Brunnhilda cried:
"Thou art a speechless demon standing there!
An eagle come to rend my living flesh!
Who art thou, awful one, so grim and stern?
Art thou a mortal? Or comest thou perchance
From awful Hella's night-encompassed
realm?"

After long silence, slowly he replied:
"A Gibich-man am I; and Gunther is my name.
Me thou shalt follow, woman, as thy lord."

Brunnhilda wailed in torture at his words:
"O ruthless Wotan! God most merciless!
Woe, woe is me! now I behold my doom;
To shame and sorrow hast thou cast me forth!"

Then Siegfried, feigning Gunther to the life,
Leaped from the rising rock on which he stood
And nearer to her drew and fiercely cried:
"The night draws on! Come, let us to thy cave!
For as thy bridegroom do I bide with thee!"

But stretching forth her hand in menace fierce,
That hand whereon her Siegfried's Ring
flashed bright,
She threatened him: "Stand back! This token
fear!
Thou shalt not force me to unlawful bonds
While this, my husband's Ring, is guard and
shield!"

Yet came he near, and laughed in utter scorn: **Destiny**
"That Ring to Gunther gives a husband's
rights;
And with that Ring shalt thou be wed to him!"

Then mad with fear and rage Brunnhilda cried:
"Avaunt, thou robber and foolhardy knave!
Nor near the vengeful might of this fierce
hand!
Stronger than steel this Ring doth make my
strength!
And never shalt thou rend it from my hold!"

But Siegfried, scorning her defiance, cried:
"Taught to defiant deeds by thy bold words,—
See, from thy hand I snatch it even now!"

Whereat he rushed upon her, clutched her
fierce,
And for awhile they wrestled thew to thew.
Then for a moment, wrenching herself loose,
She fled from him. But quick he caught her up,
Seized her with his great strength, and held
her tight.
Roughly they struggled, and her hand he
clutched
And with a mighty wrench he plucked the
Ring

From her limp finger. Wild she shrieked aloud,
And sank exhausted in his claspings arms,
With one fierce look into his fiery eyes,
As if to know forsooth her conqueror's soul;
Half swooning, down she fell in utter shame,
Before the entrance of the rocky cave.

Destiny And Siegfried all inexorable cried:
"Now thou art mine, Brunnhilda, Gunther's
bride!
Come to thy chamber with me for the night."

O'erwhelmed with fear and shame Brunnhilda
moaned:
"Nothing can help thee now, ill-fated wife!"

For Siegfried drove her on with stern com-
mand,
And trembling and with tottering steps she
went,
Despairing, into the dark cavern's depths.

When she was gone, and out of hearing's
reach,
Then Siegfried drew his sword and raised it
high,
And in his own voice spake these solemn
words:
"Now, my sword Helpneed, be my witness here
That this my wooing is both chaste and true;
And to my brother Gunther keep my troth,
Lie thou all night betwixt me and his bride!"

So speaking, slow he entered the great cave,
And the night fell, and brooding silence
reigned.

PART II: THE TOILS



THE TOILS



WAS night. And Hagen, shining
spear in hand,
And shield at side, sat in his faithful
ward,

Before the entrance of the mighty halls
Where dwelt the Gibich race upon the Rhine.
Beyond him lay an open meadow space
Upon the river's bank, sloping in verdant sward
Down to the shining beaches of the stream;
On one side, from the river-bank, there rose
A rocky height, and many mountain paths;
And on the rocky slope some altar-stones
Were visible, — one to fair Fricka there,
Goddess of love and faithful marriage-vows;
And higher up a mighty altar stood
To Wotan, sovereign Father, chief of gods;
While on the side to Donner was a stone, —
Donner, the god of storms and thunder-blasts.

Spacious the entrance to the mighty halls,
The wide doors opened toward the lordly
stream,

And Hagen sat against the mighty bulk
Of a great pillar of the entrance-hall, —
Sat dozing with the arm around his spear.
Sudden the moonlight threw its silver flood
Upon him, and there, crouching at his side,
Leaning his arms upon his very knees,
Was seen swart Alberich, who whispered low:
“Sleepest thou, Hagen? Sleepest thou, my son?
Nor hearest me, whom sloth and sleep be-
trayed?”

The Toils And Hagen softly spake, yet moving not,
Eyes open, though he seemed to slumber still:
"I hear thee, thou sad-hearted son of might,—
What hast thou now to tell me in my dreams?"

Low murmured evil Alberich to him:
"Remember well the might thy spirit holds,—
If thou art valiant in thy later years,
As when thy mother bore thee unto me."

And Hagen answered with an ugly sneer:
"Yea, she has made me full of might and
strength,
Yet little meed of thanks I give to her
That she fell victim to thine amorous wiles;
For I am old in youth, and weak and wan,
Hating the happy, and ne'er glad myself."

Seeming amazed, swart Alberich spoke on:
"Hagen, my son! the happy dost thou hate?
Then wilt thou love thy sad and hapless sire.
Still be thou crafty, strong, fearless, and bold!
Those whom we fight with weapons of the
dark,
Already by our hate are full dismayed.
And he who ravished from my hand the Ring,
Wotan, the chief of gods, and worst of thieves,
Himself by his own offspring is brought low;
The Volsung 't was that shook his pomp and
power;
And now in dread he waiteth with the gods
And heroes, for the direful day of doom.
No more I fear him, — for I know the end.
Soon must they fall and sink, and perish all! —

And still dost thou sleep on, Hagen, my son?" **The Toils**

And Hagen, never moving, whispered low:
"The immortal power, who then shall be its
heir?"

And Alberich in triumph hissed the words:
"T is mine — and thine! — the world will be our
own!

For in thy faithfulness my trust is firm,
Thou sharest all my wrongs and bitter wrath. —
'T is Siegfried shattered Wotan's mightyspear;
'T is Siegfried vanquished Fafner in fierce fight,
And snatched from him the Ring, as boyish toy;
Now Siegfried is the prince of every power
And lords Valhalla and dark Nibelheim.
On this young hero, knowing naught of fear,
My curse doth lie in vain, for unto him
The Ring hath not revealed its boundless worth;
Nor knows he how to use its splendid gifts.
Laughing in ardor of his happy love,
Glowing he burns away his radiant life.
'T is his undoing must we hope and plan, —
And still dost thou sleep on, Hagen, my son?"

And Hagen, scarcely waking, murmured soft:
"To his undoing, even now, I work."

Still Alberich with evil plot spake on:
"The golden Ring from the strong Volsung's
hold
That must we wrench. A woman wise and brave
Now holds him in her love as dear as life:
If, at her word, he giveth back the Ring

The Toils To the fair daughters of the glittering Rhine —
Ah, how they mocked me in the water's
depths! —

Then were the gold forever lost and gone,
Beyond all craft to win it back again.
Therefore bend all thy wiles to win the Ring.
For this I made thee fearless, stubborn, bold
To help my hate against the heroes' power.
Thy strength to slay the dragon was too weak,
That deed the mighty Volsung wrought for us.
But strength of hate I bred within thy heart,
To work revenge for me, and win the Ring,
And fling despite to Wotan and his breed!
Now swear this to me, Hagen, my true son!"

And Hagen, under breath, snarled forth the
words:

"The Ring these hands shall clutch, — so rest
at ease."

But Alberich, all trembling, hissed again:
"Swear it to me, my hero, Hagen, swear!"

And Hagen growled: "I swear it to myself!
So silence now your everlasting wails!"

Then came a shadow over Alberich
And he was gone. But e'er the shade was fled
A far faint voice was heard. "Be true, be true!"
Then all was still. And soon the morning gray
Began to dawn along the lordly Rhine.

Yet motionless sat Hagen with fixed eyes
And stared in silence at the flowing tide,

Lit with the coming glory of the dawn;
And gray had turned to red, and the gold sun
Was mirrored in the wide refulgent stream,
When presently up from the river-bank
Came Siegfried, showing in his own true shape,
Although the tarnhelm rested on his head.
As he came on, he doffed the woven cap,
And on his girdle hung it, as he cried:
"Ho! Hagen, sleepy head! dost see who
comes?"

And Hagen slowly raised himself and spake:
"Well, Siegfried, what a speedy hero thou!
Whence comest thou like early morning tide?"

With triumph in his tones Siegfried replied:
"From far Brunnhilda's rock! 'T was there the
breath
I drew with which I called thee from thy sleep. —
So rapid was my flight. But slower come
The bridal pair who follow me by boat."

Asked Hagen: "Is Brunnhilda won so soon?"

But Siegfried cried: "Is Gutrune yet awake?"

So Hagen shouted: "Ho! Gutrune! Come out!
Siegfried is come! Why lingerest thou within?"

And Siegfried turning to the hall cried out:
"Ye both shall hear how I Brunnhilda won!"
And to Gutrune, who came with greetings fair,
He spake: "Now make me welcome, Gibich-
maid!

The Toils For joyful tidings do I bear to thee!"

And Gutrune answered: "Freya give thee joy,
Freya, by every woman well-beloved!"

But Siegfried cried: "O grant thy gladdest
grace,
For I to-day have won thee for my wife!"

And seeming scarce to hear the words he
spake,
Eager asked Gutrune: "Doth Brunnhilda then
Follow my brother as his chosen bride?"

Laughed Siegfried: "Yea, and light his woo-
ing, too!"

"And came he through the fire unscathed?"
she asked.

And smiling answered he: "Yea, all untouched,
For in his stead I dared the walls of fire:
Thus sought I to win Gutrune for my own."

Then she: "But art thou also still unharmed?"

And with a radiant joyousness he cried:
"Ha! in the tumult of the flames I laughéd,
And gleeful trampled down the leaping blaze."

Then doubtfully she spake the searching
words:

"And did Brunnhilda deem thee Gunther's
self?"

Spake Siegfried: "Yea, we differed not a hair; **The Toils**
The magic tarnhelm served me wondrous well,
As Hagen in his wisdom had foretold."

And Hagen answered, nodding his wise head:
"I merely taught thee certain magic spells."

Then Gutrune spake again in anxious tone:
"How didst thou conquer such a valiant maid?"

And Siegfried said: "She felt great Gunther's
might."

And jealously spake Gutrune, as she said:
"And then to thee she freely gave herself?"

But he: "Nay, all the night until the morn
Brunnhilda to her rightful spouse belonged."

Cried Gutrune: "And in sooth the right was
thine!"

But quickly answered he with loving looks:
"Nay, Siegfried waited for the fair Gutrune!"

Still questioned she, with eager searching
words:
"Yet all night by thy side Brunnhilda lay!"

And Siegfried smiling pointed to his sword:
"There lies the distant North 'twixt East and
West:
So far and near to me Brunnhilda was."

The Toils Appeased at length, more quiet came her words:

"How then did Gunther gain his bride at last?"

And Siegfried answered: "As the morning dawned,

And the red surges of the fire died down,

She followed me into the misty vale;

And near the shore a space I went ahead,

And swift did Gunther take the bridegroom's place;

Then once again my tarnhelm served me well,

For as I wished for thee, hither I flew.

Ere long the bridal pair will come in sight,

For favoring winds are blowing up the Rhine;

Therefore, a gracious welcome now prepare!"

Cried Gutrune: "Siegfried, wonder-working man!

How shrink I with dismay and fear of thee!"

And looking down the river, Hagen cried:

"Behold, I see a sail that draweth nigh!"

While Siegfried cried: "Then praise its herald here!"

With merry heart said Gutrune in her joy:

"Come, let us give her worthy welcome here,

That she may tarry with us blithe and glad.

Thou Hagen, call the people for the feast

And wedding-joys in mighty Gibich's halls.

The merriest maids shall come and dance with us,

And all shall share our marriage jollities.”
And as she wended toward the hall, she smiled
And archly spake to Siegfried, as she went:
“Now, wouldst thou sleep and rest, thou
naughty guest?”

And gallantly he gave his hand to her,
And led her to the hall, with the soft words:
“To help my Guttrune is my sweetest rest.”

Meanwhile upon the castle's rocky height
That rose to landward, Hagen made his way,
And blew a mighty horn. With furious blasts
He blew and blew again with all his strength.
Then cried: “Hoho! Ye Gibich vassals! Ho!
Come quickly! Arm ye well, O arm ye well!
Weapons! bring hither weapons from all parts!
Good weapons! Mighty weapons sharp for
war!
Need, need is here! O arm ye well! Hoho!”

Again his furious blasts rang out, and quick
The cry of answ'ring horns from many sides:
And from the heights and from the far-off vales
The vassals hurried, with their fiercest arms.
Still in great throngs they came with loudest
cries:

“Who brays the horn, and summons us to
strife?

We come with all our weapons for the fray,
With weapons strong and sturdy, sharp for
strife.

Hoho! hoho! Hagen, we see thee there!
What foe is near, what desperate great need?

The Toils Who brings us strife? Doth Gunther stand in need?"

And Hagen from the height still cried aloud:
"Yourselves arm well, and tarry not, but come!
Come greet your chief, for Gunther brings a wife!"

Cried all the vassals in a loyal shout:
"But what is Gunther's need, and where the foe!"

Again he cried in horror-stricken tones:
"A wife of the Valkyries brings he home!"

And with hoarse throats cried all the multitude:
"And do her kinsmen follow for revenge?"

But Hagen shouted: "Nay, none follows him
Except Brunnhilda whom he brings as bride."

Then asked they: "Are his perils now o'erpast?
And has he conquered in a desperate fight?"

And Hagen answered: "Nay, his bride was won
By that great dragon-slayer, Siegfried called,
Siegfried the hero kept our Gunther safe!"

Then in bewilderment the vassals cried:
"Why hast thou called us and our weapons here?"

And Hagen with a grim smile spake to them:

"Here shall ye slaughter many a sturdy bull, *The Toils*
And pour on Wotan's altar the hot blood."

Cried they: "What more, O Hagen, shall we
do?"

Spake he: "And ye shall slay a boar for Froh,
A stalwart he-goat for great Donner's sake,
A sheep for Fricka, for a marriage grace!"

And with a roar of merriment they cried:
"And tell us, Hagen, how can we help more?"

So Hagen further spake: "Ay and ye must
The drink-horn take from damsels laughing-
eyed,
And pour libations down your thirsty throats."

Again they cried: "The drink-horn holding high,
What further must our war-host do for thee?"

And Hagen shouted: "Revel and carouse,
And drown yourselves in festive meat and wine;
So shall ye all give honor to the gods
That to this wedding they may give their
grace."

With peals of laughter loud the vassals cried:
"Great luck and health smile now along the
Rhine,
If Hagen, oft so grim, shall merry grow!
The 'hagen'-thorn shall prick his friends no
more,
But as the wedding herald be all joy!"

The Toils Then Hagen's face was grave as slow he spake:
"Now cease your laughter, valiant vassals all!
And make ye ready to greet Gunther's bride!
See, there she is—Brunnhilda—drawing
nigh!"

So down he came among the vassal host,
And stood among them, and on all sides spake:
"Now love your lady well, lend her your aid;
If any wrong her, take ye swift revenge!"

E'en as he spake, the bridal pair drew near,
Coming by boat. Before the bank was reached,
The bare-legged yeomen sprang into the stream
And dragged the boat ashore.

As Gunther came,
Leading the fair Brunnhilda by the hand,
Hagen stood far apart, and grimly smiled.
But hundreds clashed their weapons, shouting
loud:

"Hail and thrice hail! Welcome, be welcome,
both!

Hail to thee, Gunther! Hail to thy fair bride!"

And the lord Gunther to his vassals spake:
"Here to my castle on the lordly Rhine
Bring I Brunnhilda, fairest bride and wife;
A nobler woman never has been won!
The gods have often blessed the Gibich race,
But now their greatest blessing comes to us,—
Now shall our race arise to highest fame!"

Again the vassals clashed their steel and cried:
"Hail, Gunther! Hail! most lucky Gibich lord!"

Then Gunther led Brunnhilda further on
Up the fair river-bank, and toward the hall,
Proud with ancestral memories and fame,
But she ne'er smiled nor raised her down-cast
eyes.

Nor e'en when Siegfried and fair Gutrune came
Forth from the hall, with all their women-train.
But Gunther, when he saw them, paused and
spake:

"Hail, hero bold! My beauteous sister, hail!
Gladly I see thee at his valiant side,
Who with such courage won thee for his wife:
Here I behold two happy bridal pairs,—
Brunnhilda, Gunther,—Siegfried and Gu-
trune!"

And at the name of "Siegfried," with quick start
Brunnhilda raised her eyes and saw him there
Before her. For a moment, with proud gaze,
She looked upon him in astonishment.
Then fury blazed up in her maddened soul,
And dropping Gunther's hand, she swiftly
strode

Toward faithless Siegfried, but she speechless
stopped

In stony horror when no answering look
Came from his eyes, — no faintest sign of love
Nor recognition. All a-tremble now
She stood and glared at him. And many cried:
"What ails her? Is her mind become dis-
traught?"

And Siegfried came to her and calmly asked:
"What is it clouds my lady's fairest brow?"

The Coils Scarce mistress of herself, she faintly said:
"Siegfried, what means it? Who is Gutrune here?"

And Siegfried spake: "'Tis Gunther's sister
dear,
And won by me for bride, as thou by him."

Hot roused, she cried: "By Gunther, I . . . Thou
liest, —
Help me! The light is fading from my eyes!"
And she had fallen, had not Siegfried's arms
Quick caught her, and she looked into his face,
Hope against hope, and murmured faint at last,
"Nay, Siegfried knows me not! Now let me
die!"

While Siegfried, all unmoved, spake calm the
words:
"Gunther, thy bride is fainting, quickly haste!
Lady, awake! Here comes thy loving spouse!"

With startled cry Brunnhilda shuddering
roused,
And straight her eyes beheld great Siegfried's
hand
That wore the Ring. Then, as she saw the gold,
She started with a frightful vehemence
And shouted: "Ha! the Ring! there on his hand!
'Tis Siegfried! Else how comes he by that
band?"

The peasants asked: "What does she wildly
cry?"

But Hagen forward strode from out the throng **The Toils**
And spake: "Now to the woman's tale give
heed!"

Then struggling to restrain her stormy soul,
Deep-moved with stifled passion, loud she
cried:

"There on thy hand do I behold a ring, —
It is not thine — by force 't was reft from me
By him called Gunther. Canst thou truthful tell
How thou didst wrest from him that ring of
mine?"

And Siegfried looked attentive at the ring
Upon his finger, and uncertain said:

"That ring I gained, but not from him, for-
sooth!"

Wildly Brunnhilda then to Gunther cried:
"Thou torest from my hand this very ring
And with it made me forcibly thy bride;
Now let him know again thy might and right
And snatch from him this golden wedding-
pledge."

Spake Gunther all perplexed: "The ring — the
ring —
I gave him naught. Thou seem'st to know it
well."

But she persisted: "Where is now the ring
Which from my finger thou didst wrench and
snatch?"

The Toils And still as Gunther puzzled spake no word,
Brunnhilda in a violent passion cried:
“Ha! then ’t was he who robbed me of my ring!
Not thou, but Siegfried, traitor and base thief!”

But Siegfried, still absorbed in cloudy
thoughts,
Looked down upon the ring, and slowly spake:
“Nay, ’t was no woman’s hand gave me the
ring,
Nor did I wrest it from a bride’s fair hand;
I mind me well, — ’t was booty of a fight,
At Hate-Cave where a dragon I destroyed.”

Straightway between them Hagen came and
spake:
“Most noble dame, knowest thou well this
ring?
Is it the very ring that Gunther took?
Then is it his. Siegfried hath it by guile
And as a traitor must atone his guilt.”

In anguish terrible, Brunnhilda shrieked:
“Betrayed! betrayed! Most shamefully be-
trayed!
Deceit! deceit! Guile beyond all revenge!”

And Guttrune and the vassals cried aloud:
“Deceit? And who so shameful is betrayed?”

Raising her hands, Brunnhilda cried in wrath:
“Ye holy gods and heavenly rulers all!
Have ye ordained this heavy dark decree?
Taught me a doom such as none ever knew,

Shaped for me shame such as no mortal
shared,—

Then teach me vengeance never yet revealed!
Rouse me to wrath that never shall be
quenched!

Now let Brunnhilda's heart break utterly,—
And vengeance crush her base betrayer down!"

In vain attempt to soothe her furious mood
Spake Gunther: "My dear consort, calm thy-
self!"

But she: "Away, thou traitor, base betrayed!
Hearken, ye people, mark ye well my words!
Not here, but yonder stands my wedded
spouse!"

And all the people cried: "What does she say?
Gunther is not her spouse, but Siegfried there?"

Brunnhilda cried: "Yea, Siegfried, he alone;
He forced me to delight and joys of love."

And Siegfried in amaze cried out with shame:
"Dost thou so lightly hold thine honor's crown?
And must I of base falsehood blame the lips
That so besmire the fame of thy fair name?—
Hark, if I broke my plighted pledge of faith!
With Gunther swore I a blood-brotherhood;
My good sword Helpneed guarded well the
oath;
Its faithful blade in honor parted me
All through the bridal night from this sad
bride!"

But in fierce anger broke Brunnhilda forth:
"Thou crafty hero, see how false thy words!
For vain thou callest witness of thy sword!
Well do I know its sharp and biting blade,
And well its scabbard, wherein all so snug
It hung upon the wall and looked at us.
The good sword Helpneed was a trusty friend,
When in his true love came its lord to me!"

Then cried the vassals, with quick anger moved:
"What, hath he been a traitor to his oath?
And on great Gunther's honor put a taint?"

And Gunther, stern-faced, spake in lordly
wrath:
"Thus am I shamed and stained with deep
disgrace,
Unless thou cast her slander in her teeth!"

While Gutrune pleaded: "Siegfried, show the
truth!
Thou art not false and faithless to thine oath?
Prove that she hath accused thee wrongfully!"

The vassals cried again: "Yea, right thyself,
If thou art right; and silence her complaints.
Sworn be the solemn oath before us all!"

And Siegfried gladly spake: "Yea, I will swear,
And thus refute the slander that she speaks;
Lend me a spear whereon to swear my oath."

Forward came Hagen, speaking solemnly:
"Here do I lend my spear-point for the oath,

And well in honor shall it guard your words." **The Toils**

Quickly the vassals made a living ring
Round Siegfried. And as Hagen held the spear,
Siegfried looked up to heaven, making oath,
Two fingers of his right hand on the spear,
As solemn attestation of his words:

"Thou shining haft of war, and weapon true,
Hold in remembrance this my sacred oath!
For on this spear-point swear I now my faith!
Spear-point, thou art the witness of my words!
Where steel can strike, strike swiftly thou at
me,

If this complaining woman has been wronged,
Or if to this my brother I am false!"

But rushing wrathfully into the ring,
Brunnhilda thrust his fingers from the spear,
And grasped it with her own, as loud she cried:
"Thou shining haft of war, and weapon true,
Hold in remembrance this my sacred oath!
For on this spear-point swear I now my faith!
Spear-point, thou art the witness of my words!
I consecrate thy strength unto his death,
I bless thy sharpness to his sudden end;
For he hath broken all his solemn vows
And unto utter falsehood hath he sworn!"

In great commotion, all the people cried:
"Help, Donner, send thy deafening thunder
down
To silence this sad voice of crying shame!"

But calmly Siegfried spake unto his friend:

The Toils

"Gunther, look well unto thy lady here
Who gives thee shame by her false speaking
words!
And pray thee grant her time and give her
rest,
This angry-souled and tameless mountain-
maid,
Until her stormy passion shall die down,
Which by some demon's subtle craft and spite,
Hath roused itself in wrath against us all. —
Come, vassals, off, and let the women scold!
Craven are men when 't is a war of words!"

Then coming close to Gunther's side he spake:
"In troth, it cuts me more than it does thee,
That I did work the trick so bunglingly.
Methinks the tarnhelm only hid me half.
But look ye, — women's spite is swiftly sped,
And that for thee I won her by my craft
Somedayshe sure will give thee hearty thanks."

Forthwith he turned and to the vassals spake:
"Frolic, good fellows! Follow to the feast!
Merry ye maidens, make the marriage gay!
Let your delight and triumph laugh aloud!
Yea, in the house and field, blithest of all
Full in the frolic ye shall see me now!
All ye whom love hath blest, share merriment,
And be as gladsome as I am to-day!"

In joy exuberant, he threw his arm
Round fair Guttrune, and led her to the hall,
While men and maidens followed after them,
Singing and shouting and in merry dance.

Meanwhile, as off the merry throngs were gone, **The Toils**

A silent group of three remained behind:

Gunther, who went apart and with a groan

Seated himself, and hid his face in shame;

And Hagen, silent with sardonic leer;

And fair Brunnhilda, standing in deep thought,

Absorbed in sorrow. Gloomily she mused:

"What demon's evil spite hides in this thing?

What wizard's craft hath conjured up this storm?

And where my wisdom to annul this spell?

My runes that can resolve such riddle dire?

O depths of sorrow! Woe is me! woe's me!

All my high wisdom taught I unto him!

And now he holds me as his bounden slave!

I am his booty, chattel, fettered fast,

And, since I wail and sorrow in my shame,

He gladly shakes me off and gives away!

O who will lend me a keen-edged sword

That I may cut asunder bonds so vile!"

And Hagen, standing near, spake low to her:

"Give me thy trust, O wife most base betrayed!

I will avenge for thee these heavy wrongs."

She asked: "On whom shall this fierce vengeance fall?"

And quick he hissed: "On Siegfried, traitor vile."

But bitterly she laughed: "On Siegfried,—
thou!

One angry glance from his fierce-flashing eye,—

The Toils Such glance as even in his dark disguise
Looming upon me in his lies, he shot, —
Such fiery piercing glance would straightway
cast
Utter dismay upon thy daring heart."

Yet Hagen snarled: "Yea, 't was on my spear
That he swore falsehood. It shall be his curse!"

But scornfully Brunnhilda answered him:
"Falsehood and oath — O useless are all words!
With stronger spells must thou thy weapon
point,
If thou wouldst strikethisstrongesthero born!"

And Hagen spake: "Yea, Siegfried's conquer-
ing arm
Full well I know is sovereign in fair fight;
But whisper to me some dark hidden way, —
That I may weaken and may conquer him."

Sadly she spake, remembering past days:
"O thankless, shameless answer to my gifts!
There was no charm or spell, that well I knew,
But him I gave it to protect his life!
And now unwitting by my charms enwound
He walks and fights safe-warded from all
harm."

And Hagen: "Can no weapon bring him hurt?"

She answered: "Nay, no weapon in fair fight;
But stay, — there is one place where harm can
come:

His back,—if ever thou shalt strike his back! **The Toils**
Never as I knew well would he retreat,
Nor turn his back upon a fighting foe,—
So on his back I set no shielding spells."

And Hagen started, grimly smiled, and cried:
"And there my spear shall strike him—to his
death!"

Then quickly turned he, and to Gunther spake:
"Up, Gunther, honored lord of Gibich-men!
Here stands thy noble wife, why hangs thy
head!"

But in a woeful passion Gunther cried:
"O utter shame, and deepest black disgrace,—
I am the saddest, most distressed of men!"

Spake Hagen: "Yea, 't is true, thy shame is
great."

But quickly fair Brunnhilda spake hot words:
"O craven man, and treacherous false friend!
Behind the hero thou didst hide thyself
That he should snatch for thee his valor's prize!
Ah! low indeed had sunk thy lordly race
That brought to birth such coward as thou
art!"

Then Gunther, bursting in hot rage, cried out:
"Betrayed am I,—and as betrayer cursed!
Deceived am I,—and as deceiver cursed!
Cut to the core am I, and broke my heart!
Now help me, Hagen, for my honor's sake!
And for my mother's sake who bore us both!"

And Hagen cried: "Now helps nor brain, nor hand,
Naught helps us more, but only—Siegfried's death!"

Amazed cried Gunther: "What! great Siegfried's death!"

Spake Hagen: "Nothing else can purge thy shame!"

But horror-stricken, Gunther stared and cried:
"We swore blood-brotherhood by solemn oath!"

Then Hagen: "Broken bonds call for his blood."

But Gunther answered: "Has he broke the bond?"

Sneered Hagen: "Yea, when he betrayed thee thus."

But Gunther wondered: "Did he thus betray?"

Then hot with wrath Brunnhilda loudly cried:
"Yea, he betrayed thee—be assured of that—
And now ye doubt my honor on all sides!
O did I ask my rights, a world of blood
Scarce could atone for all your craven guilt!
Yet only one life do I now demand;
Siegfried shall fall—I ask but Siegfried's death
For his vile sin and for your coward shame!"

Then Hagen spake to Gunther under-breath: **The Toils**
"She thinks his death will bring thee wondrous
gain!

And it will bring thee power o'er all the world,
If thou shalt win from him the magic Ring
Which only death can wrest from his strong
hand."

And Gunther asked: "What ring—Brunn-
hilda's ring?"

Hissed Hagen: "'T is the Nibelung's great
work."

But Gunther paused awhile and deeply sighed:
"And this—shall this be famous Siegfried's
end!"

Cried Hagen: "Yea, his death we all demand!"

But Gunther mused: "Yet Gutrune whom he
weds, —

If we should slay her hero glorious,
How can we ever stand before her face!"

Then furious with wrath Brunnhilda cried:
"What redes have told me and what runes
have shown,

Now in heart-breaking anguish shineth clear;
This evil spell that hath beguiled my lord
Is Gutrune called! Accursèd be her fate!"

Aside to Gunther, slily Hagen spake:
"See, lest his death should grieve her overmuch

The Toils The deed must be deep hidden for awhile;
To-morrow hie we hunting merrily;
The hero shall forsooth stray from our band, —
And a wild boar shall strike him to his death!"

Brunnhilda heard, and joined in Gunther's cry:
"So shall it be, and so let Siegfried fall.
So shall the shame be purged which he hath
wrought!

The oath of brotherhood hath he forsworn;
So let his blood atone his broken vows.
O thou all-seeing god of just revenge,
Thou lord of oaths and witness of our vows!
Wotan, great Wotan, turn we now to thee!
Assemble now thy dread immortal hosts
And let them hear our vows of vengeance
fierce!"

And in grim triumph Hagen raised his voice:
"So shall it be and so let Siegfried fall!
So shall the far-famed hero be destroyed,
And mine shall be the boundless treasure
hoard;

But from him we must wrest the magic Ring!
Hearken, thou elfin father, fallen prince,
Night warder of the Nibelung's vast host!
Alberich! Alberich! Come to my aid!
Assemble now the Nibelung's great host,
Bid them obey thee, as the Ring's true lord!"

He spoke and stood alone. For Gunther quick
Had led Brunnhilda to the castle halls,
And as they came to the great open door,
They met young Siegfried in a festive dance,

Wearing a wreath of oak-leaves on his brow, **The Toils**
And hand in hand with Gutrune, crowned with
flowers.

A moment and Brunnhilda had recoiled, —
But Gunther strongly grasped her trembling
hand,

And drew her after him to the great halls,
And men and maidens followed in the dance,
Shouting in joy and singing wedding songs.



PART III: THE FALL OF VALHALLA



THE FALL OF VALHALLA



BEFORE a deep rock valley, rough
and wild,
Tangled of mighty oaks and trailing
vines,

Flows the broad lordly Rhine, and washes
smooth

The ramparts of the steep and frowning cliff
That juts above the valley like a guard,
Set on the watch-tower of the mountain-heights
Above the river-bank. And in the tide
That shimmered in the sun-light beautiful
Disported three fair daughters of the Rhine,
Woglinda, brightest maid, Wellgunda dark,
And fair Flosshilda, merriest of all.

They broke the waves in laughter, and with
shouts

Swam merrily in circles of a dance,
And as they swam they sang a gladsome song:

“FAIR Sun-God,
Thou sendest thy rays of
bright splendor,

But only grim darkness now doth engender;

Once was the night

Alive with thy light

As it smiled on our gold with glances so tender;

Rhine-gold! fine gold!

May we once more behold

This treasure of all the Rhine's daughters,

This beauteous star of the waters!

“Fair Sun-God,

O send us the great hero of men

The Fall of Valhalla

To bring us our beauteous treasure again!
Once bring it nigh
And thy glittering eye
No more will we envy with longings, we ken.
Rhine-gold! fine gold!
May we once more behold
This treasure of all the Rhine's daughters,
This glorious star of the waters!"

Scarce had the singing ceased when from the
heights
The horn of Siegfried wound in ringing blast;
Woglanda cried: "Hark, for I hear his horn!"
Wellgunda answered: "Yea, the hero comes!"
And fair Flosshilda: "Let us counsel take!"

Whereat they dived down quickly in the flood,
While Siegfried, full-armed, on the cliff ap-
peared.
A moment gazed he at the scene, then cried:
"Some elf has tempted me and led me off
Until the track I utterly have lost,—
Hey, rogue! what rocky cave in this cliff's
side
Has hidden thee and hidden that great bear?"

Sudden the three Rhine maidens softly rose,
Breaking the river's mirror and in glee
Swimming in circles, and they gaily called:
"Siegfried!" And fair Flosshilda added soft:
"Why scolest thou the rocks?" Wellgunda
asked:
"Hath some strange elf-aggrieved thee with
his tricks?"

Woglinda queried: "Hath a gnome been false?" *The fall of*
And all cried: "Tell us, Siegfried, tell us true!" *Valhalla*

And Siegfried, smiling, looked at them and
spake:

"My shaggy-hided friend has fled from me,
Perchance enticed by your alluring charms;
If he your lover be, you jolly maids,
Take him and welcome, for I'll none of him!"

And loudly laughed the nymphs. Woglinda
spake:

"Siegfried, what boon wilt thou now grant to
us,
If we give up this booty to thy hands?"

And Siegfried said: "Naught have I won to-
day, —
What is it you would beg! Speak what ye will!"

Wellgunda spake: "A golden ring I see
That gleams and glitters on thy finger there!"

And all three cried: "Yea, give us that gold
ring!"

But Siegfried answered: "From a dragon fierce
Methinks I gained that ring by slaying him;
And shall it slip my palm to buy the paws
Of a great awkward bear, scarce worth the
game?"

Woglinda cried: "And art thou then so mean?"
Wellgunda spake: "So higgling o'er a trade!"

The fall of Flosshilda: "Generous shouldst thou be with
Dalhalla maids."

But with a shrug, Siegfried quick answered them:

"And if I waste my precious goods on you,
Belike my precious wife will scold me sore."

Flosshilda laughed: "And is she such a shrew?"

Wellgunda broke in: "Does she beat thee oft?"

Woglinda: "Hath the hero felt her hand?"

And as they laughed, he answered with a smile:

"Now laugh your merriest, for soon in grief
Must ye be left. The ring ye fondly crave
Shall never yielded be to mockeries."

Then all the nymphs tried other coaxing wiles.

And sweet Flosshilda cried: "How fair he is!"

Wellgunda spake: "How strong and brave
and fierce!"

Woglinda added: "And how worthy love!"

While all three ended with a merry shout:

"How sad it is that he is miserly!"

And, laughing, down they dived beneath the
flood.

Slowly came Siegfried down the rocky heights

And neared the river-bank, and softly spake:

"Why must I brook their idle mockeries,

And thus be shamed? Let them but come again

Near to the shore, and they shall have the
ring.—



SEORPED IS WARNED BY THE PH NE-MA GENS



Hey, hey, ye merry maidens of the Rhine,
Come back again! I grant to you the ring!"

The Fall of
Valhalla

And quickly to the surface did they come,
Half nymph, half woman, dripping with the
spray;

But they looked gravely at him as they spake:

"Nay, keep it, hero,—keep and ward it well,

Until thou hast discovered the full curse

That in the magic Ring lies hidden deep.

Then happy wilt thou feel thyself to be

If we shall free thee from the direful spell."

Then quietly he placed the ring again

Upon his finger, and besought them thus:

"Now sing me what ye know of this weird
Ring!"

And solemnly they chanted words of fate:

"SIEGFRIED! Siegfried!

Sorrow awaits thee.

For thine own mishap

Thou holdest the Ring.

From the Rhine's pure gold

Was the Ring fashioned.

He whose craft shaped it,

And lost it in shame,

Laid a curse on it

For all time to come;

It dooms its possessor

Surely to death.

Thou slewest the dragon,

And thou shalt be slain—

(So we foretell it) —
This very day,
If thou refuse us
The Ring for the Rhine.
Naught but this river
Stayeth the curse."

But Siegfried, angered, sharply spake to them:
"Ye wily women, henceforth hold your peace!
For your allurements scarcely do I trust,
And your dire threats shall fright me even less!"

But still they sang to him in solemn tones:

"**S**IEGFRIED! Siegfried!
We counsel thee well;
Turn from the curse!
In the darkness the Norns
Wove up thy fate
By their mystical threads
Of eternal decrees."

Boldly spake Siegfried: "This good sword of
mine
Shattered great Wotan's spear! This mystic
thread
Of fate's decree, though woven with a curse, —
Helpneed my sword shall cut it for the Norns!
Once did the dragon warn me of this curse,
Yet never did he teach me how to fear! —
The world's great wealth this ring for me
should win,
Yet for dear love I give it willingly, —
And your fair grace had almost won my love,

But when my life ye threaten with a curse,
Ye shall not wrest the ring from off my hand,
Altho' it were not more than bauble's worth!
For should my life and limbs in bands of fear
Be fettered, without love, — see, thus would I
Fling away life and limbs without a fear!"

And as he spoke, he snatched a clod of earth,
And held it high above his head, and laughed
As with a mighty fling he threw it off.

Then spake the eldest of the nymphs and said:
"Come, sisters, let us from this dullard speed!
Though wise and valiant seems he to himself,
Yet is he fettered in deep bonds, and blind
Oaths has he plighted and not heeded them!
Runes knows he well to read, and recks them
not!

A glorious guerdon once was won by him,
And that it is not wasted, wots he not.
But the dire Ring that will deal death to him, —
That Ring he still holds fast with all its curse!
Siegfried, farewell! A woman stately, proud,
This very day will come to all thy wealth.
Come, let's away! For she will hear our prayer!"
And singing, they were quickly lost to sight.

And Siegfried, looking after, smiled and said:
"On water as on land, alike the ways
Of women I have learned full well to know!
The man who dares resist their witching smiles
They seek to frighten by their direful threats.
And when both smiles and threats he boldly
scorns,

The Fall of Valhalla

They sting him with their bitter scolding
tongues.

And yet, were Gutrune not my plighted wife,
Would I had captured one of those fair maids!"

Far on the hills the sound of hunting horns
Foretold the coming of the hunting train,
And Siegfried gaily answered with his horn.
Soon Gunther, Hagen, and the vassals came
A-clambering down the hills, with many a cry,
"Hoiho! Hoiho!" and answering cry, "Hoiho!"

When nearer, Hagen cried: "Have we at last
Found out the secret nook where thou art
hid?"

Called Siegfried: "Come down here, 't is fresh
and cool."

And they came down, and Hagen spake to all:
"Here rest we now, and ready make the meal.
Lay down the booty. Bring the wine-skins
out!"

Straightway they stacked the game in careless
heap,
And brought to hand the wine-skins and the
horns,
And lay down on the sward and took their ease.

And Hagen spake: "He hunted off from us, —
Now let us hear the wonders of his hunt,
Of Siegfried's chase and all the game he
bagged."

Laughing spake Siegfried: "Slim would be the
feast;
So from your booty I must beg a share."

And Hagen asked: "No booty canst thou
boast?"

And Siegfried smiled and answered: "None at
all.

For wood-game went I, and found water-fowl.
Yet had I been well furnished for the hunt,
A brace of three wild water-birds had I
As festive booty for my morning toil;
And from the Rhine they sang to me a song,
And told me that this day should be my last."

And Gunther started, and looked gloomily
At Hagen, who took up the strain of talk:
"That were an evil and an ill-starred chase
If the poor hunter, bootiless and worn,
Should by the lurking beasts be laid full low."

And Siegfried spake: "I thirst." And sat him
down
'Twixt Gunther and his brother, while great
horns
Brimming with wine were straightway offered
them.

And Hagen said: "Siegfried, the rumor goes
That when the merry song-birds sing their
songs,
Their speech thou knowest,—is the rumor
true?"

**The Fall of
Valhalla**

Careless spake Siegfried: "Long ago I ceased
To listen to the prattle of their songs."
He quaffed the ruby wine, and passed the horn
To Gunther with a smile and gaily said:
"Drink, Gunther, drink! Thy brother brings the
draught!"

But deep in thought and gazing gloomily
Into the drinking-horn, lord Gunther cried:
"This wine is poor and pale, — thy blood alone
is there!"

Cheery cried Siegfried: "Mingle then our
bloods!"
And taking up the horn of Gunther quick
He poured its ruddy draught into his own,
Until it overflowed upon the earth.
Then cried: "See, how the mixture overflows!
Let it be off'ring to our mother Earth!"

And Gunther sighed: "Thou over-joyous heart!"

And Siegfried, hearing him, to Hagen spake:
"Brunnhilda's frown doth mar his mirthful
face."

And Hagen answered: "If he understood
His spouse, as thou dost know the wild-birds'
song!"

Cried Siegfried: "Since I heard the winsome
songs
Of women, I heed not the songs of birds."

He asked: "Yet once thou heardest them full well?"

The Fall of
Valhalla

And Siegfried spake: "Hey, Gunther, gloomy soul,

Be gracious now, and I will sing to thee
Some wondrous stories of my boyhood days!"

Said Gunther: "Yea, with all my heart I hear."

And Hagen: "So, thou hero, sing for us!"

Upon the ground they lay in circle wide
Round Siegfried, who sat upright and sang low:

"**I**T was Mimi the dwarf,
A mannikin grim
Who had fostered me long,
Driven by greed,
And hoped, as I grew,
For him I might slay
The wood-dragon fierce
That guarded the gold.
He taught me to smith
And sword-blades to forge;
But that which the teacher
Could never achieve
By daring and patience
The pupil attained:
From shattered sword splints
I fashioned a sword,
My father's strong blade,
Forged I anew.
Stronger than Helpneed

Never was steel.
Fit for the battle,
Mimi declared.
Then through the forest
Fared he with me,
'Til Fafner the dragon
There had I slain.

“Now let your sharp ears
Heed well my tale;
Marvels I tell you.—
From the beast's blood
Scorched were my fingers;
Into my mouth
Straightway I raised them;
But when the blood
Had wetted my tongue
Then had I knowledge
What the birds sang.
One on a curling branch
Sat warbling soft:
'Siegfried now owneth
The Nibelung's hoard,
There in the cavern
Finds it anon!
And the great tarnhelm,
That let him win;
Wondrous 't will serve him
For deeds of renown.
Would he might ravish
The magical Ring!
That soon would make him
Lord of the world!’”

And Hagen eagerly the question asked:
"And didst thou take away tarnhelm and
Ring?"

The Fall of
Valhalla

The others asked: "Heard'st thou the bird
again?"

So Siegfried chanted on, and thus he spake:

"**T**ARNHELM and Ring
Quickly I seized,
Then to the warbler
Once more gave heed:
Above me he warbled,
Thus to me sang:
'Siegfried now owneth
Tarnhelm and Ring;
O let him not trust
Falsest of friends,
For Mimi doth covet
The hoard and the Ring,
And he craftily waits
For thee on the road.
Siegfried he lureth
On to his death;
O Siegfried, listen, —
Mimi trust not!'"

And out spake Hagen: "That was warning
good."

The vassals asked: "Did Mimi get his pay?"

So further Siegfried told the tragic tale:

The Fall of
Valhalla

“WITH deadly potion
Came he to me,
Shaking and pallid
Showed his false heart:
Helpneed, my good sword,
Paid him his wage!”

And Hagen harshly laughed, and grimly spake:
“The blade he could not forge he quick could
feel.”

The vassals asked: “Heard’st thou the wood-
bird more?”

Meanwhile had Hagen filled another horn
With ruddy wine, and slyly mixed with it
Some drops of a strange herb with mystic
powers
Of bringing back the long-lost memories.
And holding it to Siegfried, gaily spake:
“Come drink, my hero, from my drinking-horn
A noble draught I mingle for thee here.
Its magic thy remembrance will awake
And bring old times and memories to thee.”

A moment Siegfried gazed into the horn
In thought, then slowly drank, and chanted on:

“IN grief to the branches
Gazed I aloft,
There still the song-bird
Fluttered and sang:
‘Siegfried hath struck down
The rascally dwarf;

Now, know I for him
A glorious bride;
On a far rocky fastness
Softly she sleeps;
Flames like a barrier
Guard well her home;
Who so is fearless
And dareth the flames,—
The bride doth he waken,
Brunnhilda he wins!”

With growing wonder Gunther heard the
tale,
But Hagen coldly asked: “Didst heed the
bird?”

And Siegfried, glowing, chanted joyously:

“**S**TRAIGHTWAY I hied me
To the dread cliff;
Quick to the high rock
Girt with its flames;
Plunged through the fiery sea,
Found the fair prize,—
A wonderful woman
Slumbering soft,
Clad in an armor
Of glittering steel.
The helm I unloosened
Of this glorious maid,
And my kiss on her lips
Awoke her from sleep!
Like flames of the fire
Enkindled my heart,

The Fall of
Valhalla

Fairest Brunnhilda
Enfolded me close!"

And as he sang, he rubbed his glowing eyes,
As if to bring the fullest vision back,
And as he spake "Brunnhilda," wild he
stretched
His arms to clasp his loved one in embrace.

And Gunther cried, amazed: "What do I hear?"
While, as he spake, two ravens, dark as night,
Flew from the thicket, over Siegfried cawed,
And circled, and flew far across the Rhine.

Curtly spake Hagen then as Siegfried paused:
"Say, canst thou rightly read those ravens'
speech?"

And Siegfried started up with wondering gaze
And followed with his eyes the ravens' flight.
Now, while he watched them, he had turned
his back

On Hagen, and that traitor saw his chance,
And with a shout: "The ravens cry revenge!"
He thrust his coward spear, with stealthy blow,
Full into Siegfried's back. With sudden shriek,
"Hold, Hagen, hold! What dreadful deed is
this?"

Gunther and all the vassals rushed to hold
Dark Hagen from his deed, but 't was too late.
Great Siegfried swung his massive shield on
high

To crush his enemy with one fell blow,
But suddenly his strength was fled and gone,

His shield fell backward, and his massive
frame
Fell full upon it, as a great oak falls.

And Hagen, crying "Retribution!" fled
Swift as a flash, and in the gathering gloom
Of evening vanished in the wooded heights!
But Gunther's heart was torn, and bending
down
He wept at Siegfried's side, and all the men
Stood grimly round, in silent sympathy.

Then Siegfried, gently raised by kindly arms,
Until he sat upright upon a knoll,
Slow opened his great eyes and softly spake:
"I see thee, fair Brunnhilda, holiest bride!
Look up, and open thy resplendent eyes!
Who hath enlocked thee in the chains of sleep,
Or drowned thee in a slumber so profound?
Thy wak'ner came; he woke thee with a kiss;
He broke the bride's sweet bonds with great
delight;
And fair Brunnhilda smiled in all her charms.
Ah! now her heavenly eyes are open wide!
Ah! how enchanting is her fragrant breath!
O sweet surrender! thrills of glad dismay!
Brunnhilda beckons me! embraces me!—"

He spake and died, — her image in his heart,
Her vision in the rapture of his soul.
And reverently, on his mighty shield,
The vassals lifted Siegfried's body up,
And bore it slowly to the castle heights
In mournfullest procession. After it

The Fall of Valhalla

Lord Gunther followed, overwhelmed with grief.
The pallid moon looked through the trailing
clouds

And lit the grim procession gloomily,
Until the mournful mists rose from the Rhine
And all was hidden in the heavy night.

LONG had the sad procession wound its
way

Through darkness till it neared the castle walls
Of the great Gibich race upon the Rhine,
When through the clouds broke once again
the moon

And shed its lustre on this sorrowing train.
Within the halls, grim portents filled all hearts,
And those who slept were restless in their sleep.
From her dim chamber, holding taper light
Came Gutrune to the great hall with the words:
"Was that his horn? Nay, still he cometh not!
Strange dreams of evil drove away my sleep!
I heard the startled neighing of his horse,
I heard Brunnhilda's laughter — and I woke!
What woman saw I stealing toward the
Rhine,—

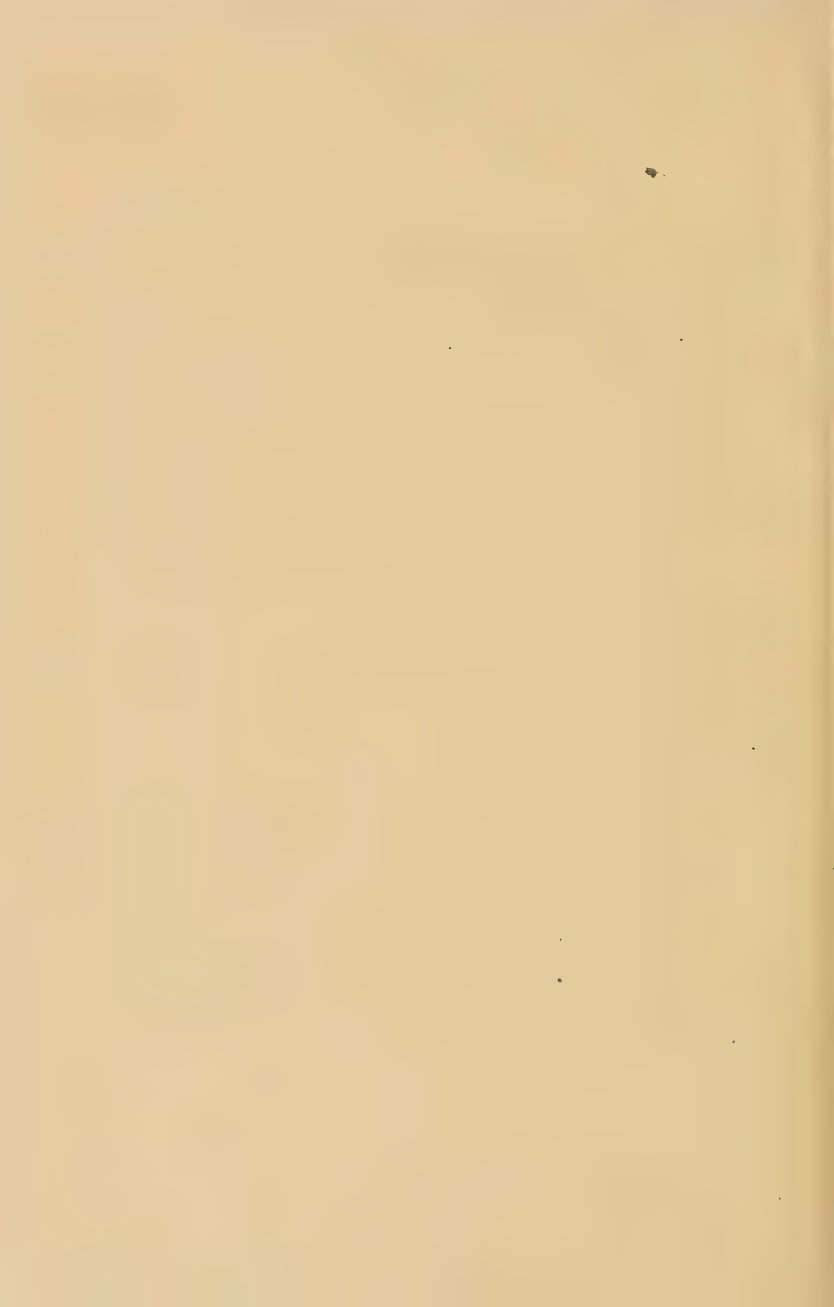
I fear Brunnhilda — is she still within?"

She listened at the door and softly called:
"Brunnhilda, dear Brunnhilda, art awake?"

But only silence greeted her, and quick
The door she opened and peered all around
Within Brunnhilda's chamber. Then she cried:
"Empty the room! 'Twas she whom I beheld,
Who sought so stealthily the river-brink."



SIEGFRIED'S BODY BORNE BY THE HUNTSMEN



Again she started, listened, spake in doubt:
"That was his horn? Nay, all is silent yet!
O how I long for Siegfried's coming home!"
And as she spake she heard a distant voice;
Transfixed with joy and fear awhile she stood;
Nearer it came. Then knew she Hagen's voice
As loud he called: "Hoiho! hoiho! Awake!
Torches! I say! Bring forth the flaming brands!
For home we bring the booty of our hunt!
Hoiho! Awake! Bring forth the flaming
brands!"

And quickly rushed the vassals with the brands
To mingle with the torches of the train.

Then Hagen, entering the hall, called out:
"Wake, Gutrune! Give your Siegfried an em-
brace!
Your glorious hero now is coming home!"

He spoke, and grimly smiled, and as he spoke
A throng in great confusion came in sight,
Women and men, with firebrands and great
lights,
Walking in state around a prostrate form,
And Gunther following, o'erwhelmed with grief.

In terror Gutrune shrieked: "O Hagen, speak!
What woe betides? Why heard I not his horn?"

And Hagen in a voice of scorn replied:
"The pallid hero winds it nevermore;
And nevermore bounds he to hunt or war;
And winsome women wooes he nevermore!"

The fall of With horror Gutrune cried: "What bring they
Valhalla here?"

For nearer yet the sad procession drew
And reached the middle of the great broad hall,
Where at the last they laid their burden down.

And Hagen sneered: "A wild boar's victim,
this!
'T is Siegfried, — 't is thy Siegfried, pale and
dead!"

And at the heartless word, Gutrune shrieked
out
And looked at Siegfried's body. In a swoon
She hurled herself upon the prostrate form
Amid the grief and tears of all the throng.
And Gunther bent above her, deep distress'd,
And strove to raise her, speaking tender words:
"Gutrune, my gentle sister, wake again!
Lift up thine eyes and speak one word to me!"

Slowly reviving, loud she sobbed and shrieked:
"Siegfried is murdered, — murdered, — woe is
me!"

Rudely she thrust back Gunther with the cry:
"Hence! traitorous brother! thou hast mur-
dered him!"

O help me! help me! woe and sorrow mine!
My hero Siegfried murdered! vilely slain!"

And Gunther spake: "Cast not reproach on me,
But put forth bitter blame on Hagen there!
He is the wild boar, treacherous and base,
By whom our hero has been vilely slain."

Cried Hagen: "Dost thou blame me for this deed?"

The Fall of Valhalla

And hot with grief and wrath, lord Gunther
spake:

"Yea, and may endless anguish be thy lot!"

Then forward Hagen stepped in hottest rage
And terrible defiance as he cried:

"Well, then! 'T is true! 'T was I who murdered
him!

I, Hagen, 't was who smote him to his death!
It was decreed upon my spear's keen point
Whereon he falsely swore his treacherous
oath!

And sacred right of booty now is mine!
Therefore I claim as mine the magic Ring."

But Gunther cried: "Stand back, thou shalt
not clutch

What in such sorrow comes to my sad lot!"

Cried Hagen: "Vassals, now uphold my right!"

And Gunther, hot with scorn and anger, cried:
"Thou seekest for thyself our Guttrune's dower,
Thou shameless spawn of evil-minded dwarf!"

Drawing his sword, cried Hagen with an oath:
"The dwarf's own dower his son now boldly
takes!"

Whereat he rushed at Gunther, and they
fought,

Sword clashing sword in desperate affray.

**The Fall of
Valhalla**

The vassals crowding sought to stop the strife,
But all too late, for with a cunning lunge
Hagen had struck great Gunther to the heart
And laid him low in death. Then with a cry,
"Now mine the Ring!" he snatched at Siegfried's hand.

But lo! the dead hand raised in threatenings,
And Hagen started back, with horror struck,
And Gutrune and the women wildly shrieked,
And all was terror.

From the shadows came
Brunnhilda, stalking solemnly and slow,
And spake: "Be still, your clamors and your
wails!

His wedded wife whom ye have all betrayed
Now cometh to wreak vengeance on ye all!
Your cries are children's whimpers softly made
To their fond mother when their milk is spilled,
Not the lament majestic that befits
The cruel death of earth's superbest heart!"

And Gutrune wailed: "Brunnhilda, envy-
cursed,
'T was thou that brought on us this weight of
woe!

For thou it was that urged them to this deed!
O woe the day when hither thou didst come!"

Brunnhilda answered: "Nay, poor soul, be still!
For thou wert never rightful wife to him;
Thy rights to him were only worthless words;
His manhood's bride am I, and I alone.
To me great Siegfried swore eternal troth
And made me his, long ere he looked on thee!"

In deep despair Gutrune broke forth in wails:
"Accursèd Hagen! woe is me! woe's me!

'T was thou that gave to him the poisoned
draught

That made her faithful husband play her false.

O deepest sorrow! Now I see it all!

Brunnhilda was his true and faithful spouse,
Whom cruel magic forced him to disown!"

And overwhelmed with shame she turned away
From Siegfried's body, and in dark despair
She bent o'er Gunther, and in anguish swooned.
While Hagen, cowering in his gloomy thoughts,
Stood sullen leaning on his spear and shield.

Long gazed Brunnhilda at great Siegfried's
form,

Awe-struck with horror, overpowered by
grief.

At length she started, and to all the throng

In solemn exultation, brave she cried:

"Come, friends, build ye a fitting funeral pyre

Of mightiest logs, here by the lordly Rhine,

And kindle ye the holiest of fires

In honor of this hero of the world.

And let his champing steed be hither brought

To bear me through the flames unto my lord;

Deep in my soul is the undying wish

To share the honor of my hero's end.—

Come, let Brunnhilda's last wish be obeyed!"

So came the young men at her fond behest

And reared a funeral pyre of mighty logs

There near the castle and the lordly Rhine,

The Fall of Valhalla

And maidens came and strewed it o'er with
flowers.

And while they made it ready, still she stood
And gazed on Siegfried's pallid face, and spake :
"What sunlight glows upon his radiant brow!
The purest was he, yet betrayer base!
Forsook his wife, yet held faith to his friend,
And from his heart's belovèd, his true love,
He barred himself by his own guarding sword. —
Nobler than he ne'er swore a marriage vow;
Truer than he ne'er held a promise true;
Purer than he ne'er plighted holy troth;
Yet none so ruthlessly hath scorned his oaths
And broken holy bonds and tender love, —
And sudden hath betrayed his faithful wife.
— But know ye why this was, the fatal spell
That quenched his memory and made him
false?

Ye gods, who guard our holy troths and oaths,
Upon my dire distress, now fix your gaze!
And with it see your own eternal doom!
Thou mightiest god, great Wotan, hear my
cry!

'T was he who dared for thee a valiant deed,
A deed most dear to all thy hope and wish.
How couldst thou thus condemn him to endure
The doom which on thyself is heavy laid?
Why must the truest be made traitor vile,
That I, a woman, might grow heavenly wise?
Now do I know what hideth in thy heart:
Yea, all things, all things, know I fully now;
Unto my vision all is made most clear.
Wotan, I hear thy ravens rustling near;

Now I shall send thy messengers back home **The Fall of**
With the long-awaited tidings of thy fate: **Valhalla**
Sink back and rest forever, mighty god!"

At length as sunset glory crept across
The sky, she rose from heavy hours of grief
And stood, and to the vassals made a sign
To lift great Siegfried's body to the pyre.
They raised him, lifting him on his broad shield
With Helpneed, his great blade, across his
breast.

Then from his finger drawing the gold ring,
She gazed upon it sadly as she spake:
"My dowry once again I make my own. —
Accursèd charm! the fatal fearful Ring!
My hand enfolds thee but to give thee up!
Ye sisters wise who dwell in the dark depths,
Give ear, ye sorrowing maidens of the Rhine;
For your good counsel take my meed of thanks;
The Ring ye long for, I will give to you.
Out from my ashes take ye the round gold!
Let the red flame that burns my body up
Cleanse this ill-fated ring from its dire curse.
And in the Rhine's full flood, wash it away
And keep alone the pure and shining gold,
The lustrous star of the deep flowing Rhine."

She set the golden ring upon her hand,
And turned her to the mighty funeral pyre.
Then snatching a great fire-brand, loud she
cried:

"Fly home, ye ravens, tell your mighty lord
What here upon the Rhine-bank ye have
learned.

The Fall of Valhalla

First to Brunnhilda's rock, wing ye your flight!
There Loki flames, — bid him Valhalla guard!
For now the twilight of the gods draws nigh;
So, — now I cast this flaming torch of fire
And kindle into flames Valhalla's towers!"

Whereat she flung the firebrand on the pyre,
And quick there rose the roaring sheets of
flame.

Two soaring ravens flew towards heaven's
height;

And standing by the pyre Brunnhilda spoke:
"Ye friends who shall abide in blossoming life,
What now I say to you mark well and heed!
When ye shall see within the fiery flames
Brunnhilda and great Siegfried fade away,
When ye shall see the daughters of the Rhine
Bear back again the Ring into the flood,
Then gaze to northward through the twilight
skies, —

If there the heavens shall glow with fiery haze,
Then know ye that Valhalla's doom has come!
And when, like breath, the gods have passed
away,

When lordless all the world is empty left, —
There still remains this treasure of the heart,
The highest wisdom that this world can
know, —

Not goods, nor gold, nor gods in royal power,
Nor houses, halls, nor lordly pomp and show;
Not guileful treaties, empty treacherous bonds,
Nor feigning custom's merciless decrees
Can bring you blessing in life's weal or woe, —
But only love can satisfy the heart.

Love is the best! Love triumphs over all!"

The fall of
Valhalla

With that, she called again for Siegfried's
steed,

And as the young men quickly brought it in,
She took the bridle off, and fondly spoke:

"Grani, my steed, — his steed, — I greet thee
friend!

Dost know to whom our happy journey leads?

By fire illumined, there my lord doth lie, —

Siegfried, star of my life, my hero blest!

Ah, neighest gladly thou to follow him?

Lo, how the laughing flames do lure us on!

My bosom now is burning with desire!

The holy fire my spirit all enfolds!

O but to clasp him, hold him in these arms,

To cling to him in an immortal love!

Ho! my good steed! give greeting to thy lord.

Siegfried! my Siegfried! See, I come to thee!

Behold! Brunnhilda greets thee with her life!"

Upon her steed, impetuous she leaped,

And for the last time sounding forth the cry:

"Hoyotoho!" — her dear old Valkyr call, —

She bounded headlong in the flaming pyre.

Up blazed the fires with fiercer might of rage

And hid her and her prancing steed from view,

And filled the throng with terror. Suddenly

The fire fell down, and a great mass of smoke

Clung to the river-bank like heavy clouds.

And then it seemed as if the lordly Rhine

Loosed all its flood-gates and with thunder-
roar

Was rising mightily, and all at once

The Fall of Valhalla

The waters rolled, a flood across the fire,
And on its crest the daughters of the Rhine,
Swimming, and seeking in the embers dark
For something that the flaming sea had left.

Then Hagen, who had stood in fear apart
Watching Brunnhilda and her daring deed,
Was seized with madness when he saw the
flood,
And the Rhine-daughters searching for the
ring;—
And flinging helmet, shield, and spear away
He plunged into the waters with the cry:
“Back from the Ring! The magic Ring is
mine!”

But quick the fair Rhine-daughters flung their
arms
Around his neck and dragged him to the
depths,
And one of them with face all wreathed in joy
Rose, holding up the long-lost magic Ring.

Slowly the Rhine descended to its bed,
The shining gold illumining its depths,
The maidens worshipping their lustrous star.

Sudden the sky was lighted with red glow,
Like many great auroras swift it spread:
The towers of fair Valhalla were aflame,
Circled with fire the gods and heroes sat;
And men beheld it in a speechless awe.
Fiercer and higher leaped the heavenly fires,
Valhalla was enwrapped in sheeted flame;

The fall of Valhalla

Valhalla, built by might and bought by guile,
Its sovereign god forsworn and desolate,
His hopes laid low, his fondest purpose foiled;
Valhalla, grounded in the greed of gold
And garrisoned by fear and base deceit.
At last, the dreadful day of doom had dawned,
The curse had worked its wrath, despair and
death;
At last, the twilight of the gods had come,
And Wotan's loveless kingdom was at end;
At last, the gathering night had covered all,
The cruel reign of loveless law was done,
Now dawned the day of nobler men and
deeds, —
For the new world of love's great law began!

THE END





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Wagner, Richard.

The dusk of the gods.

